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JUDAISM

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We mourn the passing of our beloved colleague Dr. Ruth B. Waxman, who served for more than two decades as a distinguished editor of this journal. She brought intelligence, discernment, and taste to her task, as she did to every aspect of her life. Her devoted labors were crucial in the shaping of the journal into a leading forum on Jewish life and thought. Her legacy is palpable and enduring. To her bereaved family, we offer our heartfelt condolences.

The Symbolism of the Sukka (Part 2)

J E F F R E Y L . R U B E N S T E I N

IN “THE SYMBOLISM OF THE SUKKA,” PUBLISHED IN THE Fall 1994 issue of JUDAISM, I discussed one dimension of this theme: the sukkah as a symbol of the “clouds of glory.”¹ According to the dominant rabbinic tradition seven “sukkot of clouds of glory” surrounded the Israelites throughout their desert travels following the exodus. These sukkah-clouds shielded them from the blazing sun above, protected them from the hot sand below, and guarded them from dangers such as thorns, scorpions, and even the weapons of their enemies. Six clouds covered the six sides of the Israelite camp while the seventh, the pillar of cloud of God’s presence (*shekhina*), stood in the middle. The festival sukkot in which we dwell each year symbolize these clouds and hence the protection, love, and presence of God. This sense of the divine is not only communicated through the symbolism of the sukkah but is experienced in the shade that the roofing of the sukkah casts. Shade offers protection from the sun and became the dominant metaphor for protection and peace in Jewish tradition. In the shade of the sukkah one experiences the “shade of God” and the same sense of divine protection, love and nurture which the Israelites felt while sojourning within the clouds of glory.

There is, however, a second strand in rabbinic tradition which believes that the Israelites dwelled in “real sukkot” throughout their desert travels, not in “sukkot of clouds of glory.”² The ordinary, flimsy sukkot the Israelites inhabited were part of the hardships of the exodus and their difficult life in the desert. For forty years they “dwelled in a wretched place, a place with no grain or figs or vines or pomegranates” (Numbers 20:5). The desert experience was a test of Israel’s faith, a place of “hardship” and adversity (Deuteronomy 8:15-16).³ In this view the ritual sukkah does not directly symbolize the clouds of glory or the consummate divine protection it bestowed.

This second dimension of the symbolism of the sukkah conceives it as a symbol of the transience, temporariness, and insecurity of this world. To be sure this symbolism is in some tension with the symbolism of the clouds of glory. But that is part of the power and complexity of religious symbols, which are multivalent and polysemous, operating on several levels and expressing different meanings simultaneously. Indeed, the complex, sometimes contradictory, nature of religious symbols devolves from the complex, sometimes contradictory, nature of the human condition and experience of the divine.

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2. Biblical and Talmudic Images

In the heat of summer a sukka provides agricultural laborers with a shady, protective shelter from the sun. Guards and watchmen sit in the shady sukka during the long hours of duty throughout the summer months. In villages, too, a sukka built on the roof of a house or in the adjacent courtyard offers a cool place to dine or sleep during periods of extremely hot weather. But throughout winter the picture changes. Workers abandon the fields until the next harvest season. Winter rains and chills force watchmen to seek warmer, sturdier shelters during their infrequent visits to check on the orchards. For weeks and months sukkot stand neglected by their builders, subject to wind, rain, storm, and frost. Gradually the roof falls in, the arboreal covering withers and wastes away, the walls or corner-posts weaken. Until the next growing season the sukka stands alone in the field—isolated, dilapidated, crumbling.⁴

The Bible accordingly employs the sukka as a symbol of fragility and vulnerability. Amos' famous prophecy compares the breached Davidic kingdom to a fallen sukka: "In that day I will set up again the fallen booth of David: I will mend its breaches and set up its ruins anew. I will build it firm as in the days of old" (Amos 9:11). The prophet gives us an idea of how a sukka typically appeared in the winter months. The roof collapsed, gaps formed in the walls, and the structure was ruined. This picture served as a vivid metaphor for the decayed state of David's kingdom, its cities ruined, and its line of defenses breached. Just as the watchmen would rebuild the sukka for the following season and mend the damage, so God promises to restore David's territory. Until then the fallen sukka stands alone in the field embodying instability and insecurity.

Similar imagery appears in Isaiah's opening prophecy: "Your Land is a waste, your cities burnt down; before your eyes the yield of your soil is consumed by strangers—a wasteland overthrown by strangers! Fair Zion is left like a sukka in a vineyard, like a hut in a cucumber field, like a city beleaguered" (Isaiah 1:7-8). The prophet compares the devastated country, with its wasted land and burned cities, to a sukka in a vineyard. Like a land pillaged by enemies, unprotected, exposed to strangers, its inhabitants exiled, so the sukka in a vineyard stands alone, unprotected, and vulnerable. We should imagine that the vines have been harvested and the denuded vineyard abandoned until the following season. Similarly Job says of the evil man: "The house he built is like a bird's nest, like the sukka a watchman makes. He lies down a rich man, with his wealth intact; when he opens his eyes it is gone" (Job 27:18). The sukka again symbolizes impermanence and fragility. It is frail as a bird's nest and liable to collapse overnight.

This cultural symbolism was complemented and reinforced by the halakhic conception of the sukka that developed in the Talmudic period. The Babylonian Talmud defined the sukka as a "temporary dwelling" (*dirat 'araî*) as opposed to the house, a "permanent dwelling." The Talmudic sages

understood the Bible's command that one leave one's house and dwell in a sukkah for seven days to imply that the sukkah itself should be constructed for brief stays and not extended habitation.⁵ A sukkah was a type of dwelling built for a "temporary," seven-day stay, not for "permanent," ongoing dwelling. Based on this notion the Talmud places various structural limits on the sukkah. For example, a sukkah may not stand higher than twenty cubits because only permanent dwellings are built to such heights.⁶ The structural limitations based on this notion are actually few and far between.⁷ Much more important are the definition of a sukkah as a "temporary dwelling" and the connotations of that phrase. The essence of the sukkah became its temporariness. Jewish thought conceived of the sukkah as something inherently impermanent and associated it with things ephemeral, transient, and fleeting.

3. Medieval Literature

Exegetes, homilists, and philosophers based important religious and ethical lessons on the concept of the sukkah as a temporary dwelling and on the commandment to relocate from the house to the sukkah, from a "permanent dwelling" to a "temporary dwelling." Their comments typically devolve from Lev 23:42-43: "You shall live in sukkot seven days; all citizens in Israel shall live in sukkot, in order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in sukkot when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I the Lord your God." Meir Loeb Malbim explains these verses as follows: "Future generations should not be overconfident at the time of the harvest, when their houses are full of good, and think that this world is their purpose and the foundation of their life." Rather, "they should appreciate that *I made the Israelite people dwell in sukkot*, and should realize that this world is a guesthouse and a temporary dwelling. Thus they leave their permanent dwelling for a temporary dwelling, which is what the sukkah symbolizes, as the sages have written."⁸

Malbim seeks to explain why the Festival of Sukkot takes place specifically at the time of the autumnal harvest. After all, the Israelites sojourned in sukkot throughout the forty years they wandered in the desert. Why should future generations commemorate that ongoing situation specifically at harvest time in the month of Tishrei? Why not dwell in sukkot for seven days during Adar or Tevet or some other month? Indeed, the Israelites first began to dwell in sukkot during the month of Nisan when they left Egypt and immediately required shelter. Perhaps future generations should celebrate the festival of Sukkot in Nisan following Pesach rather than in Tishrei following Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur?

Malbim explains that there is in fact good reason why one should leave home and dwell in sukkot, particularly at harvest time. After the harvest season stocks of food have been replenished and houses swell with crops and bounty. Humans naturally look upon the fruits of their land, their good fortune, and

material prosperity as hard-won triumphs. We take deep satisfaction in what we have produced. We believe that we have realized our goals and accomplished our purpose in life. But this, for Malbim, is a dangerous delusion. This world is but a “guesthouse” and “temporary dwelling” over against the World to Come. To remind us that our focus should not be this-worldly goods but rather other-worldly salvation, God commands us to leave our homes specifically at the time of greatest prosperity, when houses fill with the bounty of the harvest. Just at that time God commands his people to leave behind the riches of the home for poorer domiciles so as to retain the proper perspective.

For Malbim, this important truth is communicated more by entering the sukka and understanding why God commanded his people to dwell there than by the dislocation experienced by departing from one’s house. Both the sukka and this world are temporary dwellings. The temporariness of the sukka symbolizes the ephemerality of the present world. While residing in the temporary sukka the resident comes to appreciate her true purpose in life—not to dedicate herself to producing abundant crops but to the religious worship that God demands.

Ephraim Solomon ben Aaron of Luntshits, author of the commentary *Keli Yaqar*, offers a similar explanation of the commandment: “*All citizens in Israel shall dwell in sukkot* [Leviticus 23:42]. It says specifically “citizen” which refers to sojourners. That is, at the time of the gathering of the crops from the field, each individual desires to return from the fields to his house to take up his permanent residence there. The Torah worried lest because of this permanent dwelling he become over-confident, thinking his strength mighty, and *grow fat and kick* [Deuteronomy 32:15]. Therefore it specifically says *All citizens*. God commanded those who aim to be sojourners in this world, and not residents, to leave their permanent dwellings for temporary dwellings, so that each one recognize how little his stature, for he is only a sojourner and alien in this world, not a resident who establishes his dwelling place. This way he will not trust in the shade of his house, but *will dwell in the shade of Shaddai* [Psalms 91:2], as the Israelites did when they went forth from Egypt.”⁹

Like Malbim, the *Keli Yaqar* points out that it is precisely at the time of the harvest that overconfidence and hubris are the greatest dangers. Surveying what are ostensibly the fruits of one’s own hard work, one tends to lose sight of the fact that God ultimately provides all the goods of the world. The permanence of the house with its full stocks seduces the owner into thinking his condition secure. To forestall such haughty thoughts the Torah commands that one leave the house and dwell in the sukka, a temporary dwelling. The frail sukka reminds the resident of life’s fragility; take away crops and house and there is little to boast about. The sukka exposes our true state: we are “sojourners” in the world, who come in naked and leave naked. This explains why the Torah uses the rare term “citizen” (*ezrah*), which the author interprets to refer to temporary settlers rather than permanent residents. The commandment is directed to those who realize that they are but passing through the

temporary world. Hence the sukkah symbolizes the essence of human existence in this world—temporary, ephemeral, and fleeting. The resident of the sukkah learns to place his trust not in the work of his hands but in the “shade of God.”¹⁰

This lesson—that one learn to trust in the “shade of God”—is championed by Isaac Arama in his biblical commentary *Aqedat Yishaq*. “. . . [God] fixed the Festival of Sukkot on the fifteenth of the seventh month, which is the beginning of the rain and the cold, and commanded us to leave our permanent dwelling where we live throughout the year to stay in the sukkah, which is a temporary dwelling, beneath the heavens. This is the opposite of what the rest of the world does at this time. For they come in from the fields and courtyards to houses covered with wooden roofs. That is to say, desist from your concerns about the weather according to which you plan to take shelter in the solid houses that you build, and come take shelter in my shade. . . . For truly *He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, and abides in the shade of the Almighty* (Psalms 91:1) lives a secure life.”¹¹

Isaac Arama observes the anomalousness of relocating from a secure house to a fragile dwelling. Normal human behavior, as exemplified in the “rest of the world,” is to leave the fields and orchards following the harvest season and move back into the house. After the crops have been gathered there is no reason to lodge outside of the house, no reason to sleep under a flimsy shelter when a wooden roof beckons. Indeed, anyone aware of the changing seasons knows that the weather is turning colder now. The Bible, on the other hand, commands Jews to invert natural human conduct and to leave the “permanent dwelling” of the house for the temporary dwelling of the sukkah specifically when these climatic changes take place. They should ignore the climatic reality and take shelter not in the protection of the house but the protection of “God’s shade.”¹²

There is a keen paradox in Arama’s commentary, for in his view the sukkah actually provides superior protection to the house. There one experiences true divine security in the shade of the sukkah—the shade of God. “Permanent” and “temporary” are deceiving in that the temporary sukkah provides the permanent protection of God’s presence. By dwelling in the sukkah one professes belief in the transience and vulnerability of the seemingly permanent world.

Arama emphasizes this idea by insisting that one leave behind all wealth, comforts and material possessions and move into a “small sukkah.” There the bare necessities—a bed, table, chair, light, and food for the day should suffice. In this way the preoccupation with amassing wealth ceases, “for he should suffice only with what is necessary as long as he is in this vestibule which is a temporary dwelling.” Here Arama cites Mishna Avot 4:15, “This world is similar to a vestibule before the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the vestibule so that you may enter the banquet-room.” The sukkah is thus identified with temporary existence in this world, the vestibule, before one enters the World to Come.

A stunning new application of this symbolism appears in Moshe Alshikh's *Torat Moshe*, one of the leading Kabbalistic commentaries on the Torah: "The soul is spiritual, its glory transcends the heavens, and it has there a permanent dwelling. When it comes to this world it is as though they say to it: go from your permanent dwelling and stay in this temporary dwelling, and prepare for yourself every type of food you eat in the higher world, because surely you will return to your permanent dwelling. You will bring there the bread of the temporary world from Torah and from the six hundred and thirteen commandments, for this is the bread for your soul."¹³

Alshikh interprets the move from the house to the sukka as an allegory of the soul's migration from its permanent dwelling in the spiritual realms to the material existence in the body. The temporary stay in the sukka parallels the soul's brief stay on earth. Just as entering the sukka fulfills a commandment, so the soul's purpose in its "temporary world" of the body is to fulfill the commandments. Here the soul nourishes itself on the spiritual "bread" of the commandments before returning with this mystical "food" to the higher worlds. The sukka thus symbolizes the fleeting existence of the soul in the material world.

Alshikh therefore considers the sukka a symbol of the impermanence of this world, as we saw in the Malbim. He insists that we should not care whether we have riches in the world or poverty, whether we sleep on comfortable beds and pillows or on rocks and boards, whether we eat delicacies or bread and water, whether we dress in fine linen or sackcloth. The sukka reminds each person to think of herself as a wayfarer in this world and to be satisfied with whatever she happens to be given. It is all a temporary condition, for soon she returns to her house in heaven, with eternal comforts and riches. "What does wealth matter to me as long as I carry the burden of the Torah and the commandments in this passing and fleeting world. I make an effort in the temporary dwelling so as to become rich in the permanent dwelling." The sukka teaches that "there is no permanent dwelling except the higher world, and on the day of one's birth she goes from the permanent dwelling to the temporary dwelling." Alshikh also observes that dwelling in sukkot can be seen as a reminder of the fact that the *shekhina* is in exile. Just as the *shekhina* has been separated from its proper place among the other *sefirot*, so we leave our proper residences on Sukkot for a temporary exile in the sukka.¹⁴

Jonathan Eybescheutz in his volume of homilies *Ye'arot Devash* also considers the sukka a type of exile: "The Torah instructed that on Sukkot, which occurs at the end of the period of repentance, we take upon ourselves an exile, and consider the whole world as nothingness and as a shadow. Therefore they [the sages] said, "Leave your permanent dwelling and dwell in a temporary dwelling" [bSuk 2a]. This teaches that we are sojourners on the earth, without permanence, and our lives are like a shadow, *which appeared overnight and perished overnight*—[Jonah 4:10] the wind blows and he is no more. And *what profit is there for a man in all the gains he make beneath the sun*" [Qohelet 1:3].¹⁵

Eybescheutz understands the move to the sukka as a type of voluntary exile that functions to atone for sins.¹⁶ The season of repentance extends after the Days of Awe until the end of Sukkot, so such acts of atonement are appropriate.¹⁷ In addition, while residing in the sukka one realizes the insignificance of this world, that it is but “nothingness” and “a shadow,” and that human life is equally insubstantial. The allusion to Jonah 4:10 adds to this idea in a masterful fashion. Recall that Jonah first enjoyed the shade of the plant that grew upon his sukka and then felt so miserable when God destroyed it that he wished to die. God taught him a lesson by suggesting that if Jonah could be so bitter about the destruction of the plant “which appeared overnight and perished overnight” then he should understand God’s concern for the citizens of Nineveh. The short-lived plant provided the shade of Jonah’s sukka, and it is that shade or shadow—the same Hebrew word, *tsel*, is used for both—that Eybescheutz compares to the brevity of human life. Just as the shade of Jonah’s sukka was ephemeral, so human existence in this world is ephemeral. Just as Jonah learned an important lesson in his sukka, so the annual sojourn in a sukka teaches this important truth. Indeed, Eybescheutz proceeds to recommend that one metaphorically inhabit a sukka throughout the year: “The God-fearing man, the one who trembles at the words of the King, he should not only have this sukka on the Festival of Sukkot alone, but throughout the year he should consider everything a temporary dwelling, and he should reside in the shade of the sukka, and leave his permanent dwelling. . . . For the righteous, the whole world should always be a temporary dwelling.”

4. The Experience of Shade

The sukka, for these and other authors, symbolizes the ephemerality and brevity of human life in this world. But how is that symbolism experienced? To some extent of course the structure and appearance of the sukka express these notions. The knowledge that the sukka is defined legally as a “temporary dwelling” may also contribute, although intellectual knowledge is not always translated into experience. Yet to understand fully how the “temporariness” of the sukka is experienced it is necessary to analyze the rabbinic concept of the sukka.

The essence of the sukka, for the rabbis, inheres in the special thatched roofing, the *skhakh*, and the shade it produces.¹⁸ The terms “sukka” and *skhakh* derived from the same root that means “to weave together,” “to cover with branches,” or “to form shade.” Elsewhere the Mishna uses the term *sekhakhot* to refer to overhanging branches of trees.¹⁹ Rashi explains that “it is called a *sukka* on account of the shade, since it provides shelter (*mesukhakh*) from the heat.”²⁰

The bulk of the halakhic requirements of the sukka pertains to the *skhakh* and the shade. The first Mishna of the tractate rules that a sukka that casts less shade than sun is invalid. A shelter, hut, or shed with rudimentary walls but a

plastered or wooden roof remains a shelter, hut, or shed—it is not a sukka. One may not build a sukka within a house, since inside the house one cannot sense the shade of the sukka.²¹ For the same reason one may not sleep under a bed in the sukka or eat beneath a barrier that impedes the shade.²² In these cases the sukka produces shade but that shade is not experienced by the occupant. Nor may a sukka be built under a leafy tree.²³ Here the occupant of the sukka experiences the same shady covering he would experience within the sukka. But the shade is not produced by the *skhakh* of the sukka alone, so the sukka is not valid. Rabbinic law requires that the occupant directly experience the shade of the sukka. In sum, the essence of the rabbinic sukka is the shade it casts, and the essence of the ritual is to experience the shade.

What then does one experience in the shade of the sukka? In Jewish tradition shade primarily represents the protection of God, as seen in the comments of Isaac Arama and, as I mentioned at the outset, in relation to the symbolism of the clouds of glory.²⁴ Yet shade is a profoundly ambivalent concept in Judaism and in other religions. If shade bestows protection from the sun, offering refuge and tranquillity, it also involves the absence of light, the body, and the corporeal world. Shade is not material, not quite of this world. It cannot be grasped or held. Shade suddenly appears when a cloud moves in front of the sun, and disappears just as suddenly when the cloud passes by, lasting but an instant. This second aspect of shade is expressed in Eybescheutz's homily and finds prominent expression in Jewish thought. Shade and shadows are associated with the fleeting, the ephemeral, the non-substantive.

A psalm recited at funerals compares the brief life of a human being to a fleeting shadow: "Man is like a breath, his days are like a passing shadow" (Psalms 134:4). The poor and downtrodden narrator of Psalm 102 laments, "My days are like a lengthening shadow; I wither like grass" (102:12). Reflecting on the brevity of human life Job observes, "Man born of woman is short-lived and sated with trouble. He blossoms like a flower and withers; he vanishes like shade and does not endure" (Job 14:2). Note that shade is coordinated with what is short-lived and impermanent. Likewise Qohelet warns that "It will not be well with the scoundrel and he will not prolong his days, which are as a shadow" (Qohelet 8:13). In the prayer he recites on his death bed, King David acknowledges, "For we are sojourners with You, mere transients like our fathers; our days on earth are like a shadow, with nothing in prospect" (1 Chronicles 29:16). These images are particularly striking in this context. As he is about to pass from this world King David realizes that life amounts to a brief and transient sojourn and compares it to a passing shadow.²⁵

The rabbis express the same idea in an extreme way in their commentary to Qohelet 1:2, "'Utter futility!' said Qohelet, 'Utter futility! All is futile!': 'Solomon said something and did not explain it, and David his father explained it. . . . Solomon said, *Who can possibly know what is best for a man to do in life—the few days of his fleeting life, which he spends as a shadow* [Qohelet 6:12]. What kind of a shadow? If it is like the shadow of a wall—it has substance. If it

is like the shadow of a tree—it has substance. David came and explained, *His days are like a passing shadow* [Psalms 134:4]. Rabbi Huna said in the name of R. Aha: ‘Like a bird that passes by and its shadow passes with it.’ Samuel said, ‘Like the shadow of bees which has no substance at all.’”²⁶

The passage asks what “Solomon,” the putative author of Qohelet, had in mind when he compared human life to a shadow. If he meant the shadow of a wall or tree, then the simile is not so harsh. At least the shadow of walls and trees is substantive. Such shadows provide the benefit of shelter from the sun and heat as long as they last. And each day, when the sun shines again, the shadows return. The passage rejects this possibility and explains the simile in terms of a similar simile found in the Psalms, attributed by the rabbis to David. Human life is not like the shadow of a wall but like a *passing* shadow, the kind of shadow that has no substance or use. The additional comments of the rabbis amplify this point. Rabbi Huna explains the “passing shadow” as that provided by a bird flying overhead which disappears in a flash. Samuel suggests that Solomon meant that human life is like the shadow of a bee, so insignificant that it lacks all substance. For the rabbis shade or shadows represented the briefest and most ephemeral existence.

A similar image appears in the prayer *Unetane toqef*, recited in the *musaf* ‘*amida* in the high holiday liturgy. The prayer relates how God determines the fate of human beings on the Day of Judgment: who will live and who will die, who will prosper and who will suffer, who will be at rest and who will wander. It then proceeds to a gloomy description of the human condition: “A human being’s origin is dust and his end is dust. He spends his life in the earning of his bread. He is like a fragile vessel, like the grass that withers, the flower that fades, *the shadow that passes*, the cloud that vanishes, the wind that blows, the dust that scatters, the dream that flies away.” The relentless series of images graphically illustrates the brevity and frailty of human life. Like the “shadow that passes,” life in this world lasts for the briefest of moments.”²⁷

We can now appreciate how impermanence and transience are experienced within the sukkah. The occupant constantly experiences the shade of the *skhakh*, which Jewish tradition associates with the brevity and insignificance of human life. Biblical commentators and moralists who understand the sukkah as a symbol of the ephemerality of this world and human existence draw on this experience.

5. The Reading of Qohelet

This awareness of the sukkah as a symbol of the ephemerality of life in this world helps to understand why the Book of Qohelet is read on Sukkot. This tradition has long puzzled commentators. Sukkot is considered the most joyous festival, “the time of our rejoicing,” when “you shall have nothing but joy” (Deuteronomy 16:15). The festival follows the autumnal harvest at the close of the agricultural year when the cessation of labor invites unbridled celebration. Appropriately the festival of *Simhat Torah*, “Joy of the Torah,” takes place on Sukkot. The

Book of Qohelet, on the other hand, is a somber, harsh, even depressing meditation on the human condition. It bemoans the meaninglessness of life, human finitude and mortality, the inexorability of time, the shortness of memory. Qohelet appears to be the antithesis of the joyousness of Sukkot.

The answer to this incongruity may lie in recognizing this second dimension of the festival and of the symbolism of the sukka. If the sukka represents the impermanence of this world and reminds the occupants of the insignificance of material possessions, then its symbolism and the message of Qohelet are analogous. Reading Qohelet in the synagogue publicly and concretely expresses each individual's private experience in the "temporary dwelling."

Many of Qohelet's sober thoughts call to mind the ideas the commentators express in terms of the symbolism of the sukka. Qohelet tells us, "I multiplied my possessions. I built myself houses and I planted vineyards" (Qohelet 2:7). He amassed cattle, silver, gold and other riches and became more wealthy than all previous rulers: "Then my thoughts turned to all the fortune that my hands had built up, to the wealth that I acquired and won—and oh, it was all futile and pursuit of wind. There was no real value under the sun" (2:11). Qohelet realized that riches simply bring momentary pleasures, not lasting value. And he knew that when he died, his riches would bring him no benefit at all. The wise man, Qohelet tells us, understands that "there is a time for every experience, including the doom, for a man's calamity (death) overwhelms him" (8:5-6). He realizes that he is mortal and has limited time on earth, that all he has are "fleeting days" (9:9). Qohelet did not share the rabbinic confidence in eternal life in the World to Come, where the rabbis expected their "permanent dwelling place" to be. But he forcefully expressed the rabbis' sense of the impermanence of this world and all human affairs. Thus the liturgical reading of Qohelet and the ritual dwelling in the sukka combine to instill an important religious value.²⁸

This does not mean that Sukkot is not a time of celebration and rejoicing. Sukkot remains *zeman simhatenu*, "the time of our rejoicing," at the conclusion of the harvest. Rather the sukka as symbol of the impermanence of this world channels the joy of the festival in a specific direction. We rejoice not on account of material prosperity in this world, though that is surely reason to give thanks, but at the joy of fulfilling the commandment, of residing in the "shade of God," and of the future inheritance of the World to Come. The joys of this world, like this world itself, are not unreal, but they are certainly fleeting and ephemeral.

The two images clustering around the sukka—the sukka as symbol of the clouds of glory and the sukka as symbol of the impermanence of this world—express two fundamental rabbinic ideas. Human beings are under God's protection, care, and providence in this world, just as the Israelites were in the desert sojourn. Yet this world, material possessions and all this-worldly experience—joy, suffering, prosperity, satisfaction, and sickness—are transient. Only divine protection transcends this world and endures in the next. Samson Raphael Hirsch brings the two together:

Not troubled and careworn, not sad and gloomy, not *mista'er* (troubled) is the life which we lead in the tabernacle (*sukka*) built by the trust in God and covered by the love of God. Why should it worry you that it is only a *dirat 'arai* (temporary dwelling), transitory hut, that one day it will leave you or you will leave it? The walls may fall, the covering may wither in the storm, God may call you outside; but the sheltering love of God is everywhere and constantly with you, and where it bids you to dwell, where it protects you, there *teshvu ke'ain taduru*,²⁹ you dwell, were it only for a moment, in the most fleeting and transitory dwelling, as calmly and securely as if it were your house forever.³⁰

NOTES

1. "The Symbolism of the Sukka," *Judaism* 43 (Fall 1994), 371-387. See too Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *The History of Sukkot in the Second Temple and Rabbinic Periods*, Brown Judaica Series (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), chapter 6.
2. *Sifra 'Emor* 17:11, edited by I. Weiss (New York, 1946 [Vienna, 1862]), 103a-b; *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Pisha* §14, edited by H. Horovitz (Jerusalem, 1960), p. 48; *Mekhilta Beshalah, petihta*, p. 80; *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai*, edited by J. N. Epstein and E. Z. Melamed (Jerusalem, 1955), pp. 33 and 47; bSuk 11b.
3. On the different views of the wilderness experience in the Bible, see S. Talmon, "The Desert Motif in the Bible and in Qumran Literature," *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations*, edited by A. Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 31-62.
4. In many agricultural societies one can still see booths, huts, and other such shelters in this condition during the winter months.
5. See bSuk 2a. The origin of the concept of the *sukka* as "temporary dwelling" is complex and devolves, in part, from other legal considerations. See Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, "The Sukkah as Temporary or Permanent Dwelling: A Study in the Development of Talmudic Thought," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 64 (1993): 137-166. This definition is not found in the Palestinian Talmud.
6. bSuk 2a.
7. See *Mishna Berurah* n. 5 to *Shulchan 'Arukh*, 'Orah Hayyim, 628:1, n. 12 to 628:2, n. 3 to 633:1, n. 2 to 634:1.
8. *Hatora vehamisva*, §207.
9. Commentary to Lev 23:42.
10. Rashbam (Rabbi Samuel b. Meir) offers a similar interpretation of the commandment in his commentary to Lev 23:43: "This is the explanation. *You shall observe the festival of the Lord seven days when you have gathered in the yield of your land* (Deuteronomy 16:13) at the time when you gather in the yield of the land and your houses are full of every bounty—grain and oil and wine, in order that you remember that *I caused the Israelites to dwell in Sukkot* in the desert for forty years, without an inheritance and territory. Then you will give thanks to Him who gave you an inheritance and houses full of good, and you will not say in your hearts *My own power and might of my own hand have won this wealth for me* (Deuteronomy 8:17). . . . Therefore they leave their houses, which are full of plenty from the gathering, and dwell in sukkot, so as to remember that they [the Israelites] did not have an inheritance in the desert or houses in which to dwell. Because of this God set the festival of Sukkot during the time of the gathering of the grain and wine. So that one not become proud because of the houses full of plenty lest he say *My own power . . . won this wealth for me* (Deuteronomy 8:17)." Rashbam also explains the commandment to leave the house and dwell in the *sukka* as a way to instill appropriate attitudes and values. A rigorous biblical commentator, Rashbam does not mention the rabbinic term "temporary dwelling." Yet his comment draws on the theme of the *sukka* as the opposite of the security and permanence of the house. The annual dwelling in sukkot, like the Israelites dwelling in sukkot during the exodus, expresses a lack of territory, habitation, or possessions. The *sukka* serves as a reminder that material prosperity comes from God, not from independent human effort. Similar ideas can be found in Isaac Aboab, *Menorat Hama'or*, edited by

C. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1961), 315-316. See too Philo, *The Special Laws*, 2:208-214.

11. Isaac Arama, *Agedat Yisbaq* (Pressburg: V. Kittseer, 1849), 3:91. See too 3:93a. Similar thoughts are expressed by Samson Raphael Hirsch: “*Sukka*, the building of the tabernacle, teaches you trust in God. Whatever may be your station in life, whether you are richly or poorly endowed with the goods of this world, you are neither dazzled by abundance nor frightened by want. The goods of the earth are not your goods. It is *mipsolet gornékha*, with that which others reject and despise that you build this tabernacle of your life. You know that whether men live in huts or in palaces, it is only as pilgrims that they dwell; both huts and palaces are only *dirat ‘arai* (a temporary dwelling), form only our transitory home”; Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Collected Writings* (New York: Feldheim, 1984), 2:49. (On *mipsolet gornékha* see Deut 16:13 and bSuk 12a.) Note the interpretation of Sukkot as a pilgrimage festival not in terms of a pilgrimage to the Jerusalem temple but a pilgrimage in this world.

12. See too Isaac Aboab, *Menorat Hama’or*, edited by C. Chavel (Jerusalem, 1961), 318.

13. Moshe Alshikh, *Torat Moshe* (Jerusalem: Lev Sameah Institute, 1990), 3:187-188 to Lev 23:33-34. For another allegorical interpretation see Shlomo Goren, *Torat Hamo’adam* (Tel Aviv: Tsiyoni, 1964), 113.

14 Ibid., 3:194-195 to Lev 23:43.

15. Jonathan Eybescheutz, *Ye’arot Devash* (New York: Edison, 1971), 41b. The final phrase echoes Ps 103:16, “Man, his days are like those of grass; he blooms like a flower of the field; a wind passes by it and it is no more.”

16. This draws on older rabbinic sources. See *Pesiqta DeRav Kahana*, edited by B. Mandelbaum (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1987), pp. 457-458: “R. Eleazar bar Maryom said: Why do we make a sukka after Yom Kippur? To tell you this: You find that on Rosh HaShana God judges all human beings, and on Yom Kippur he seals the sentence. It may be that the sentence of Israel will be exile. Accordingly they make a sukka and exile themselves from their homes to the sukka, and God counts it as if they were exiled to Babylon. . . .” On exile as atoning for sin see bSanh 37b and bBer 56a.

17. In the middle ages Hoshana Rabbah, the last of the intermediate days of Sukkot, was considered the day when the judgment of Yom Kippur was sent forth from heaven.

18. See “Symbolism of the Sukka,” 377-378, for full discussion and further examples.

19. mAh 8:2, tAh 9:3, mNaz 7:3, mNid 7:5.

20. Rashi, bSuk 8b, s.v. ‘amar. The Aramaic term for sukka is *metaltala*, from the root TLL, shade.

21. mSuk 1:2; *Sifra ‘Emor* 17:4, 102d.

22. mSuk 1:3, 2:1; bSuk 10b, 21b.

23. mSuk 1:2, *Sifra ‘Emor* 17:4, 102d.

24. I discuss this at length in my previous article. See “The Symbolism of the Sukka,” *Judaism* 43 (Fall 1994), 371-387.

25. See too Ps 109:23.

26. *Qohelet Rabbah* 1:2. The rabbis claimed Solomon authored the book of Qohelet. The term “explained” (*perash*) has the sense of “specify.” David “specified” what kind of shade Solomon meant.

27. The prayer *Ki ‘anu ‘amekha* also concludes “Our days are as a passing shadow, but your years are endless.”

28. Eybescheutz, above p. 6, cites a verse from Qohelet in his explication of this symbolism.

29. bSuk 27a. This is a Talmudic principle: “you shall dwell [in the sukka] in the same manner in which you live [in a house].”

30. *The Collected Writings*, 2:50.

Dan Pagis and the Poetry of Displacement

ROBERT ALTER

IT IS A CURIOUS FACT THAT THE THREE LEADING Hebrew poets of the generation that began to publish shortly after the founding of the State of Israel were all born in German-speaking Europe—Dan Pagis in Bukovina, Yehuda Amichai in Bavaria, and Nathan Zach in Berlin. Of the three, Pagis's cultural displacement was the most drastic. Zach and Amichai both were brought to Palestine with their families in the mid-1930s, Zach at the age of five and Amichai at the age of twelve. Pagis did not reach Palestine until 1946, after having spent the first part of his adolescence in a Nazi concentration camp. The product of a Germanized Jewish home in what was once an eastern province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, he probably never would have known Hebrew, never have had any serious connection with Israel or the Jewish cultural heritage, had he not been expelled from Europe by this ghastly spasm of historical violence and cast, for lack of any other haven, into the Middle East.

In the astonishing space of three or four years, he was publishing poetry in his newly learned language. This rapid determination to become a poet in Hebrew, I venture to guess, was not only a young person's willed act of adaptation but also the manifestation of a psychological need to seek expression in a medium that was itself a radical displacement of his native language. Displacement would remain a governing concept in Pagis's poetry, from the repeated and often flaunted effects of defamiliarization in his imagery, to his eerie refractions of the cataclysm that swept away European Jewry, to the global perspectives of his remarkable "evolutionary" and science-fiction poems, where time is accelerated, distorted, even reversed, and earthly existence is seen characteristically from an immense telescopic distance.

In stressing the role of Hebrew as the poet's linguistic medium of displacement, I do not mean to suggest that Pagis is estranged in any way from the language in which he writes. In fact, the revolution in Hebrew verse that he, Amichai, and Zach helped bring about was above all the perfection of a natural-sounding colloquial norm for Hebrew poetry. Perhaps it may have been easier for them to do this because as children suddenly called upon—by the inexorable pressure of their peer groups first of all—to possess a completely

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new linguistic competence, their primary associations were with the spoken language. Of the three, Pagis and Amichai make the most frequent efforts to incorporate elements of classical Hebrew in their predominantly colloquial diction, but in opposite ways—Amichai quite often imbedding allusive and ironically pointed bits of traditional texts in his own language, Pagis more unobtrusively modulating into locutions that recall in the Hebrew a higher literary decorum or, occasionally and somewhat distantly, a specific biblical or rabbinic text. As a poet, Pagis generally prefers contemporary vehicles and a contemporary sound, but it is also worth keeping in mind that the sixteen-year-old immigrant ignorant of Hebrew so thoroughly assimilated the rich classical tradition of the language that in his scholarly work he became the foremost living authority on the poetics of Hebrew literature in the High Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

The experience of displacement that I have proposed as a key to Pagis's poetry is felt most pervasively in the brilliant obliquity of the stances he typically assumes. Again, the contrast with Amichai, who is so often confessional, autobiographical, vividly personal, is striking. There is a submerged freight of horror in a good deal of Pagis's work, but precisely because the historical occasion for it is so enormous, the way he finds to give it compelling expression without the shrillness of hysteria or the bathos of pseudoprophetic pronouncement is to cultivate a variety of distanced, ventriloquistic voices that become authentic surrogates for his own voice. When he writes a poem called "Autobiography," it is the autobiography of an archetype, Abel, the first victim; Abel is also, among many other avatars, Dan Pagis, 1939–45:

you can die once, twice, even seven times,
but you can't die a thousand times.
I can.
My underground cells reach everywhere.

In the poems that deal directly with genocide, this use of distanced and multiple voices is linked with an impulse to pull apart the basic categories of existence and reassemble them in strange configurations that expose the full depth of the outrage perpetrated. It is as though time and space (the affinity with the science-fiction poems is clear), man and God, self and other, body and soul, had been spun through a terrific centrifuge to be weirdly separated out, their positions disconcertingly reversed. The concluding stanza of "Testimony," to cite one of many memorable examples, extracts from its reconstitution of the cosmos an irony so comprehensive that it almost includes a note of consolation in its bitter dream of an encounter between wraithlike man and wraithlike God. The final clause of the poem turns dizzyingly on a verse from *Yigdal*, the medieval hymn based on Maimonides' Thirteen Principles, which declares that God "has no body [*guf*, rendered in the translation below as 'face'] nor the image of a body."

And he in his mercy left nothing of me that would die.
 And I fled to him, floated up weightless, blue,
 forgiving—I would even say: apologizing—
 smoke to omnipotent smoke
 that has no face or image.

Odd as it may seem at first, Pagis is also a playful poet. The operation of this playfulness is perfectly continuous with the radical displacements of his more darkly brooding poems. The apparent contradiction here is readily resolved. If displacement has been one of the basic conditions of his own existence, the decision to make that condition into poetry was a way of converting it from a fate passively suffered into an imaginative ordering actively achieved. The same poetic force that juggles ontological categories in the Holocaust poems, transforming Creator and victim alike into faceless smoke, or a fleeing refugee into “imaginary man” (in “Instructions for Crossing the Border”), is also behind the metamorphosis of armchairs and balloons into strange and wonderful animals in the delightful group of poems, “Bestiary.” The oddest animal of the bestiary is, of course, that predatory biped who “alone/cooks animals, peppers them.” But this oddness is only the reverse, witty side of the perception in the Holocaust poems of something radically uncanny about man—abysmally so when he puts on boots and marches people into boxcars, astonishingly so when as victim he manages, despite everything, to survive. In “Bestiary,” however, the oddness of the human animal produces a kind of existential comedy:

... he alone laughs, rides of his own free will
 and, strangest of all, rides of his own free will
 on a motorcycle.
 He has four limbs,
 two ears,
 a hundred hearts.

Another relatively late poem, “Jason’s Grave in Jerusalem,” is a striking illustration of these metamorphic powers of imagination, of how the once-displaced person has become an artificer of suggestive displacements. Jason’s tomb really exists in the midst of a prosperous residential neighborhood in Jerusalem, a city where the living and the dead are in any case mingled promiscuously through architecture, topography, and archaeological remains surrounded by urban bustle. This is one of the rare poems in which Pagis actually introduces an explicit element of the Israeli landscape; characteristically, he spins out of this Jerusalem burial chamber dug into the living rock an imaginative credenza in which land and sea, incarceration and flight, the contemporary and the archaic, life and death, myth and actuality, spiral around each other in a lovely dance.

The Hellenistic Jason of the Judean King Yannai's court blends into the legendary Jason pursuing the golden fleece. The catalyst for this and all the other transformations of the poem is the image of a ship scratched on the wall of the tomb—in effect, an emblem inscribed within the poem's imagined world of the magical property of artifice to become a vehicle of escape from the constraints of the quotidian, from what Pagis elsewhere calls “the limits of physics.” The golden fleece seized by this Jason, as we learn in the last three lines, turns out to be the sheer sensuous splendor of the Mediterranean world through which the fabled hero glides. In the Hebrew, that climactic sensuousness is made palpable in the rich play of alliteration and assonance through which the concluding nine words of the poem are finely interwoven: *shémesh shel máyim/méshi shel ruah/sháyish shel kétzef*. No translation could reproduce just that effect, but here as elsewhere, the resourcefulness and sensitivity of Stephen Mitchell's version are remarkable. For Pagis's poetry is not only wry and shrewdly colloquial (qualities more readily translatable into contemporary English), but it also on occasion delights in the texture of language and the feel of experience this texture is made to match. For that quality, too, Stephen Mitchell has fashioned eminently workable English equivalents. Thus, at the end of “Jason's Grave in Jerusalem,” Pagis's antique sailor is said to smuggle, “with great profit . . . very expensive merchandise.” And now those last three lines in English:

sunlight of water,
velvet of sea-breeze,
marble of foam.

Some English discussions of Pagis's work have tended to pigeonhole him as a “poet of the Holocaust,” but in fact his imaginative landscape extends from the grim vistas of genocide to the luminous horizon of medieval Hebrew poetry in the Iberian peninsula. He is after all, the gifted expositor of Moses Ibn Ezra, Judah Halevi, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, and the other great poets of the eleventh and twelfth centuries who responded so richly to the colors and images and aesthetic values of worldly existence, who celebrated in the intricate, formal artifice of their verse the abiding power of art. Pagis's own poetry, of course, is necessarily more understated and more conversational than the medieval texts he has studied, but in its distinctively modern idiom it, too, is a self-conscious demonstration and affirmation of what the poetic imagination can do.

Nine Poems

DAN PAGIS

English translations by Stephen Mitchell

Testimony

No no: they definitely were
human beings: uniforms, boots
How to explain? They were created
in the image.

I was a shade.
A different creator made me.

עדות

And he in his mercy left nothing of me that would die.
And I fled to him, floated up weightless, blue,
forgiving—I would even say: apologizing—
smoke to omnipotent smoke
that has no face or image.

לא לא: הם בהחלט
היו בני־אדם: מדים, מגפיים.
איך להסביר. הם נבראו בצלם.

אני הייתי צל.
לי היה בורא אחר.

והוא בחסדו לא השאיר בי מה שימות.
וברחתי אליו, עליתי קליל, כחל,
מפיס, הייתי אומר: מתנצל:
עשן אל עשן כל יכול
שאין לו גוף ודמות.

DAN PAGIS (1930–1986) was born at Radutz in Rumanian Bukovina and raised in Vienna. A survivor of the Nazi concentration camps, he came to Israel as an orphan and lived in Kibbutz Merhaviah. After teaching for several years at the regional kibbutz school in Qiryat Gat, he enrolled at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and supported himself as a high school teacher of Hebrew literature. The holder of a doctorate in medieval Hebrew poetry, Pagis joined the faculty of the Hebrew University in 1962 and published several scholarly works, among them *The Secular Poetry and Poetics of Moses Ibn Ezra and His Generation* (1970) and *Innovation and Tradition in Secular Medieval Hebrew Poetry* (1976). In 1946, he began writing Hebrew poetry, including translations. His poetry books include *The Shadow Dial* (1959), *Late Leisure* (1964), *Transformation* (1970), and *Brain* (1975). The Hebrew poems are published by permission of the Jewish Publication Society.

A Lesson in Observation

Pay close attention: the world that appears now
at zero-point-zero-one degrees
was, as far as is known,
the only one
that burst out of the silence.

It hovered within a blue bubble, fairly large;
and sometimes there were clouds, sea breezes,
sometimes a house, perhaps a kite, children,
and here and there an angel,
or a garden, or a town.
Beneath these were the dead, beneath them
rock, beneath this the fiery prison.

Is that clear? I will repeat: outside there were
clouds, screams, air-to-air missiles,
fire in the fields, memory.
Far beneath these, there were houses, children.
What else?

שְׁעוֹר בְּתַצְפִּית

The little dot on the side? It seems to be
the only moon of that world.
It blew itself out even before this.

שִׁימוּ לֵב, הָעוֹלָם הַמוֹפִיעַ עֲכָשָׁו
בְּאַפְס פְּסִיק אַפְס אַחַת מֵעֲלוֹת
הָיָה,
עַד כְּמָה שִׁדְרֹעַ, הַיְחִיד
שֶׁחָרַג מִן הַדְמָמָה.

רַחֵף בְּתוֹךְ בּוֹעָה כְּחֹלֶה, גְּדוֹלָה לְמַדִּי:
וּלְפַעֲמִים הָיוּ עֲנָנִים, רוּחוֹת יָם,
לְפַעֲמִים בֵּית, אוֹלֵי עֲפִיפּוֹן, וְיֻלְדִים,
וּפֶה וְשֵׁם מְלֶאךָ,
אוּ גֵן גְּדוֹל, אוֹ עִיר.
מִתַּחַת לְאֵלֶּה הָיוּ הַמֵּתִים, מִתַּחַתָּם
הַסֵּלַע, מִתַּחַתָּיו כֹּלָּא הָאֵשׁ.

בְּרוּר? אִמֵּר זֹאת שְׁנִית: בְּחוּץ הָיוּ
עֲנָנִים, זַעֲקוֹת, טִילִים אוֹיֵר־אוֹיֵר,
אֵשׁ בְּשָׂדוֹת, וּכְרוֹן.
מִתַּחַת לְאֵלֶּה, עֵמֶק, הָיוּ בְּתִים, יֻלְדִים. מָה עוֹד.

הַנִּקְדָּה שֶׁבְּצֶד? זֶה כְּנֶרֶחַ
הַיָּרֵחַ הַיְחִיד שֶׁל הָעוֹלָם הַהוּא.
כִּבְּה אֶת עֲצָמוֹ עוֹד לִפְנֵי כֵּן.

Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car

here in this carload
i am eve
with abel my son
if you see my other son
cain son of man
tell him that i

כתוב בעפרון בקרון החתום

כאן במשלוח הזה
אני חוה
עם הכל בני
אם תראו את בני הגדול
קיו בן אדם
תגידו לו שאני

Autobiography

I died with the first blow and was buried
among the rocks of the field.
The raven taught my parents
what to do with me.

If my family is famous,
not a little of the credit goes to me.
My brother invented murder,
my parents invented grief,
I invented silence.

אוטוביוגרפיה

מתי במכה הראשונה ונקברתי
בשדה הטרשים.
העורב הורה להורי
מה לעשות בי.

משפחתי מכבדת, לא מעט בזכותי.
אחי המציא את ההרג,
הורי את הבכי,
אני את השתיקה.

Afterwards the well-known events took place.
Our inventions were perfected. One thing led to another,
orders were given. There were those who murdered in their own way,
grieved in their own way.

I won't mention names
out of consideration for the reader,
since at first the details horrify
though finally they're a bore:

you can die once, twice, even seven times,
but you can't die a thousand times.
I can.
My underground cells reach everywhere.

When Cain began to multiply on the face of the earth,
I began to multiply in the belly of the earth,
and my strength has long been greater than his.
His legions desert him and go over to me,
and even this is only half a revenge.

אַחַר כֵּךְ נִפְּלוּ הַדְּבָרִים הַזְכוּרִים הַיָּטֵב.
הַהִמְצָאוֹת שֶׁלֵּנוּ שְׁכַלְלוּ. דָּבָר גָּרַר דָּבָר,
הוּצְאוּ צוּיִם. הָיוּ גַם שֶׁהֲרִגוּ לְפִי דֶרֶכְכֶּם,
כְּבוּ לְפִי דֶרֶכְכֶּם.

לֹא אֶזְכִּיר שְׁמוֹת
מִתּוֹךְ הַתַּחֲשֻׁבוֹת בְּקוֹרָא,
כִּי בַתְּחִלָּה עֲלוּלִים הִפְרָטִים לְהַבְעִית,
אַבֵּל בְּסוּפוֹ שֶׁל דָּבָר הֵם מִיָּגְעִים:

אַתָּה יָכוֹל לְמוֹת פַּעַם, פַּעַמִּים, אֲפֹלוּ שֶׁבַע פַּעַמִּים,
אַבֵּל אֵינִי יָכוֹל לְמוֹת דִּבְבוֹת.
אֲנִי יָכוֹל.
תֵּאֵי הַמַּחְתָּרֶת שְׁלִי מִיָּגְעִים לְכָל מְקוֹם.

כַּאֲשֶׁר הַחַל קִין לִפְרֹץ עַל פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה
הַחֲלוּתִי אֲנִי לִפְרֹץ בְּבֶטֶן הָאָדָמָה,
וּמִזְמַן עוֹלָה כָּחִי עַל כָּחוֹ.
גְּדוּדָיו נוֹטְשִׁים אוֹתוֹ וּמַצְטָרְפִים אֵלַי,
וְאֲפֹלוּ זֶה רַק חֲצִי נִקְמָה.

Draft of a Reparations Agreement

All right, gentlemen who cry blue murder as always,
 nagging miracle-makers,
 quiet!
 Everything will be returned to its place,
 paragraph after paragraph.
 The scream back into the throat.
 The gold teeth back to the gums.
 The terror.
 The smoke back to the tin chimney and further on and inside
 back to the hollow of the bones,
 and already you will be covered with skin and sinews and you will live,
 look, you will have your lives back,
 sit in the living room, read the evening paper.
 Here you are. Nothing is too late.
 As to the yellow star:
 it will be torn from your chest
 immediately
 and will emigrate
 to the sky.

טיוטת הסכם לשלומים

טוב טוב, אדונים הזועקים חֶמֶס בְּתָמִיד,
 בַּעֲלֵי־נֶס טוֹרְדָנִים,
 שֶׁקֶט!
 הַכֵּל יֵחָזֵר לְמָקוֹמוֹ,
 סְעִיף אַחֵר סְעִיף.
 הַצֶּעֱקָה אֶל תוֹךְ הַגֶּרוֹן.
 שְׁנֵי הַזָּהָב אֶל הַלֶּסֶת.
 הָעֵשֶׂן אֶל אַרְבוֹת הַפֶּחַ וְהַלָּאָה וּפְנִימָה
 אֶל חֵלֶל עֲצָמוֹת,
 וּכְבֹד תִּקְרְמוּ עוֹר וְגִידִים וְתַחִיָּה.
 הִנֵּה עֲדִין תַּחִּיו לָכֶם,
 יוֹשְׁבִים בְּסֻלּוֹן, קוֹרְאִים עֵתוֹן עֶרֶב.
 הִנֵּה הַנֶּכֶם! הַכֵּל בְּעוֹד מוֹעֵד.
 וְאֲשֶׁר לְכּוֹכֵב הַצָּהָב: מִיָּד יִתְלַשׁ
 מֵעַל הַחֹזֶה
 וַיִּהְיֶה
 לְשָׁמַיִם.

Instructions for Crossing the Border

Imaginary man, go. Here is your passport.
You are not allowed to remember.
You have to match the description:
your eyes are already blue.
Don't escape with the sparks
inside the smokestack:
you are a man, you sit in the train.
Sit comfortably.
You've got a decent coat now,
a repaired body, a new name
ready in your throat.
Go. You are not allowed to forget.

הוראות לגנבת הגבול

אדם בדוי, סע. הנה הדרכון.
אסור לך לזכר.
אתה חייב להתאים לפרטים:
עיניך כבר כחולות.
אל תברח עם הנצים מתוך
ארבת הקטר:
אתה אדם ויושב בקרון. שב נינוח.
הרי המעיל הגון, הגוף מתקן,
השם החדש מוכן בגרוןך.
סע, סע. אסור לך לשכח.

Point of Departure

Hidden in the study at dusk,
I wait, not yet lonely.
A heavy walnut bureau opens up the night.
The clock is a tired sentry,
its steps growing faint.

From where? In Grandfather's typewriter,
an Underwood from ancient times,
thousands of alphabets are ready.
What tidings?

I think that not everything is in doubt.
I follow the moment, not to let it slip away.
My arms are rather thin.
I am nine years old.

Beyond the door begins
the interstellar space which I'm ready for.
Gravity drains from me like colors at dusk.
I fly so fast that I'm motionless
and leave behind me
the transparent wake of the past.

נקדת המוצא

חבוי בחדר הספרים לפנות ערב
אני ממתין, עדין לא בודד.
ארון אגוז כבד פותח לי לילה.
האורלוגין, זקוף עין,
צעדיו פוחתים.

מינו? במכונת הכתיבה של סבא,
דגם אנדרווד מימים קדמונים
מוכנות אלפי אלפא-ביתין.
איזו בשורה?

אני חושב שלא הכל בספק.
עוקב אחר הרגע, שלא יחמק ממני.
יש לי זרועות קצת דקות,
אני בן תשע.

מעבר לדלת מתחיל
החלל הבין-כוכבי שאני כבר מוכן לו.
הכבד אויל מתוכי כצבעים לפנות ערב.
אני טס מהר מאד, עד בלי נוע,
ומשאיר מאחורי
שבל שקוף של עבר.

The Limits of Physics

In the deep armchair, the boy sits motionless.
The universe obeys laws.
November, powdered graphite, passes .
yellowing in the cloud, glimmering
in the challenge of sulphur.

גבולות הפיזיקה

In the armchair, the boy sits.
The lightning-rod waits on his head, motionless.
The brass glitters.
The iron filings swirl in the magnetic field
and rise, somewhat obliquely, to their fate.
The boy, motionless, sits in the magnetic field.

בכרסה הרבה שקוע הילד בלי נוע.
העולם נשמע לחקים.
נובמבר, גראפיט מפזר, עובר,
מצהיב בענן, מהבהב
באתגר הגפרית.

Now the cloud whitens. The brass telescope
(it's also called a spyglass) ,
catches it easily.
The universe obeys laws in a dry rustle
like falling leaves (but more silent).
Thus cold electricity sparkles
when you rub amber with silk.

בכרסה שקוע הילד.
בראשו, בלי נוע, ממתינ כלירעם.
הפליז מבהיק מאד.
בשדה המגנטי נחפזים שיפי הברזל
ועומדים לגורלם, נטויים כלשהו.
הילד שקוע בלי נוע בשדה המגנטי.

In all this there is a great consolation, but
suddenly in a gap of the cloud
a wheel of swallows
bursts
from a wheel of swallows.

עכשו מלבין הענן. משקפת הפליז
(היא נקראת גם קנה הרגול)
לוכדת אותו בנקל.
העולם נשמע לחקים ברשרוש יבש
כמו של שלכת (אבל שקט יותר).
כך מנצנץ החשמל הקר
בשפשוף הענבר במשי.

The boy is alive,
alive, bursting,
waving himself out of himself.
All laws obey him at once:
his fall
is free.

בכל אלה יש נחומים גדולים מאד, אבל
לפתע בפתח ענן
בוקע
גלגל סנוניות מתוך
גלגל סנוניות.

הילד חי,
הוא חי ובוקע,
הוא מניף את עצמו מעצמו.
כל החקים נשמעים לו מיד:
נפילתו
היא נפילה חפשית.

Jason's Grave in Jerusalem

Jason, that cunning old sailor,
one of King Yannai's inner circle,
pretends that he was buried
far from the sea,
in an attractive grave in a holy city.
"Room within room he is hidden, adorned by pillars and arches;
peace and perpetual glory were carved for him in this limestone."

The grave is empty.
Only a drawing of a ship
is scratched on the wall.

Overhead, kingdoms have fallen,
new men have descended into Hades.

Not Jason. He slips away
again and again,
out of the blank wall,
in a fast ship
(cuts through the sea of air, maintaining
absolute radio-silence)
and with great profit, as always, smuggles
very expensive merchandise:
sunlight of water,
velvet of sea-breeze,
marble of foam.

קבר יסון בשכונת רחביה

יסון, ימאי ערמומני,
מאנשי סודו של ינאי המלך,
מעמיד פנים שנקבר
הרחק מים,
בקבר נאה, בעיר קדש.
חדר בחדר טמון הוא, מפאר בעמוד ובקשת,
הוד ושלל עולמים נחצבו לו באבן הגיר.

הקבר ריק.
רק דמות של ספינה
חרוטה בקיר.

למעלה נפלו ממלכות,
אנשים חדשים ירדו לשאול.

לא יסון. הוא חומק
מתוך הקיר החלק
בספינה מהירה
(הוא בוקע את ים האויר
בדממת אלחוט מחלטת)
ומבריק ברוח גדול, כתמיד,
סחורות יקרות מאד:
שמש של מים,
משי של רוח,
שיש של קצף.

Technology and Responsibility: Reflections on Genesis 1–3

S. D. N. C O O K

Should the emancipation and secularization of the modern age, which began with a turning-away, not necessarily from God, but from a god who was the Father of men in heaven, end with an even more fateful repudiation of an Earth who was the Mother of all living creatures under the sky?

– Hannah Arendt¹

TECHNOLOGY AND RESPONSIBILITY ARE NOT AMONG the most common themes associated with the creation and Eden myths of Genesis. They are, however, inescapable themes of contemporary life: what we take our responsibilities to be in exercising our power to shape the earth, now amounts to deciding whether life on this planet will flourish or die. Yet, in the face of this, even the most contemporary eye can discover in the opening chapters of Genesis, the first of all Jewish texts, an account of technology and responsibility as suitable to the modern condition as any to be found. And to Jewish eyes, whether religious or secular, these ancient myths can offer a contemporary and realistic understanding of what it means to “heal the world.”

The following is an interpretation and commentary on the creation and Eden myths.² Its aim is to show that they can be seen to depict our relationship to nature as intimate and dependent; to characterize our technological practices as limited, not by the scope of our powers, but by what is required for the sustenance of nature as well as ourselves; and to define human beings as moral agents with the responsibility to look after the needs of nature, in no small way by gauging the moral worth of our technological works.

2. Our Relationship to Nature

The opening chapters of Genesis describe the relationship between humans and nature as intimate and mutually dependent. In the creation story human-kind is made literally “from the dust of the earth” [2:7].³ This connection with the material stuff of nature is emphatically underscored at the end of the Eden story when humans are told that they were taken out of the ground and will return to it: “you are dust,” God says, “and to dust you shall return” [3:19].

The closeness of this relationship is given symbolic power by the sharing of a name between humans and the earth. The name “Adam” in English comes from the Hebrew *Adam*, which is the word used in the passages dealing with

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the creation of humankind—when, for example, God says “Let us make *Adam* in our image, after our likeness” [1:26]. The word used for the earth out of which *Adam* was made is *Adamah*. They are the same noun: *Adam* is the masculine form, *Adamah* is the feminine. We are literally earth-creatures. There is a sense of this connection also in English in the cognate relationship between the words “human” and “humus.” (The identification of the earth as feminine and humans as masculine reflects the traditional agricultural or poetic characterization of the earth being, like woman, the receiver of seed and bearer of fruit.)

In the first three chapters of Genesis the creation story is given in two complementary parts, each with its own focus on the creation of humans. The account of the seven days describes the creation of humankind as a whole. The Eden story tells of the creation of human individuals. In the first part, humankind is created as a species. After God says, “Let us make *Adam* in our image, after our likeness” [1:26], the text goes on to say, “male and female, God created them.” The passage is not about the creation of an individual. This is seen as well in parallels of language between this passage and the passages immediately before dealing with the creation of the other animals. When God creates the creatures of the sea, air, and land, the words used for them are, in Hebrew, singular collective nouns—words that take the singular form but that can refer to collectives, like the English words fish, fowl, and cattle. The word *Adam* can also be a singular collective noun, meaning Humankind.

So the sense of these passages is one of the creation of many species of animals, one of which is humankind. Our relationship to nature here is in terms of our being one species among many, particularly among many species of animals of the earth. This account of the creation of humankind has something of the flavor of the scientific understanding of our appearance on the earth as a species through evolution. It also runs counter, as Hannah Arendt points out, to Augustine’s contention that God created the animals collectively, while creating a first human individually.⁴ Any distinction Augustine wishes to give humans over wildlife on this score would seem to require that we ignore this first account of human creation.

The Eden myth, however, speaks of the creation of human individuals. The first human is made from the dust of the earth, again suggesting our connectedness to the physical stuff of nature. The reference to the individual is clear enough—the text reads: “the Lord God formed this human [*et HaAdam*] from the dust of the earth. God blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the human [*HaAdam*] became a living being” [2:7]. A living being, not living beings.

The first human is put in the Garden of Eden and told to till it and tend it (and not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil). Then God says, “It is not good for the human to be alone, I will make a fitting helper for him” [2:18]. “Alone” underscores the text’s shift from the species to the individual. This observation ultimately leads to the creation of a second human, but not immediately. In fact, the very next thing the text tells us is that “the Lord God formed from the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought

each to the human, to see what he would call it; and whatever the human called it as a living being, that became its name” [2:19]. Significantly, these animals, like humans, are created “from the earth,” and are created after the humans, not before as in the first part—a narrative sequence which runs counter to seeing humans as God’s final product, the “crown of creation.”

Now, this episode gets names for all the animals, but this is not all that it is about. It is also a lesson in biology, one dealing with the biological creation of individual beings through sexual reproduction. In naming the animals the human identifies each species. Each one is distinct from the others (just as God through much of the early part of the creation story made distinctions between light and darkness, water and dry land, etc.). The animals are not all of a piece, they exist in kinds. By naming them, the human identifies those kinds, establishing a biological taxonomy that recognizes one form of orderliness in nature (themes I will return to shortly).

After the animals are named by kind, the text says: “but for the human no fitting helper could be found” [2:20]. Once the notion of animal kinds is established and an order to the animal kingdom laid out, we see that there are no living beings “corresponding” or “fitting” to the human. From the beginning of the creation story on, all manner of living things, animal and vegetable, are described as reproducing “after their own kind.” There is a deep concern in these myths with an orderly constitution and sustenance of kinds. The human cannot reproduce with any of the other animals. It is in this sense that they are not “fitting” or “corresponding.”

So, the story of the creation of the second human focuses on biological creation of “fitting” individuals through sexual reproduction. Here the text reads: “So the Lord God caused a deep slumber to fall upon the human, so that the human slept; God took one of the human’s ribs and closed up the flesh in its place. The Lord God fashioned [built, crafted] the rib taken from the human into a woman and brought her to the human. And the human said ‘This one at last is it! Bone from my bones, flesh from my flesh! She shall be called Woman for from Man she was taken!’ Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” [2:21–24].

The myth is both poetically and didactically a basic lesson in the biology of sexual reproduction. One need not be much of a Freudian to see in the “deep slumber” the “sleeping together” of a sexual union. The rib is not only a phallic symbol, but also a symbol of the seed that the male contributes to a sexual union. “Flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone” underscores the fact that humans are biologically of the same flesh, they reproduce after our own kind. At the end, the passage moves from the level of the individual to the level of the generations: in leaving their fathers and mothers and clinging to fitting helpmates, humans leave the “flesh” of the generation that gave them life and “become one flesh” in establishing a new generation that can continue the generations of human life. This part of the story sets the status of humans as a species reproducing its individual members sexually after its own kind, and thereby marks humankind’s intimate

relationship to the *biological* stuff of the earth, which is just as much part of nature as the “dust” or the *material* stuff out of which our species was made as a whole.

We are related to nature also through our biological genders. In the Eden story, the human who is made out of the dust of the earth and the breath of life from God is ultimately identified as male. His origins are material and divine: the earth and God. So the male represents our relationship to the material part of nature: the earth from which we were made or evolved, which is depicted as a source of life, although not itself living. At the end of Chapter 3, this is emphasized when God directs explicitly to Adam, the male, the remark “you are dust, and to dust shall you return.”

The sources of the woman, on the other hand, are human and divine: the rib of the human and the handiwork of God. This reflects a powerful symbolic role associated with the woman throughout the story. The female represents our connection to the biological stuff of nature, including our ability to sustain that life. At the end of Chapter 3, the text reads: “The human called his wife’s name Eve, for she became the mother of all the living” [3:20]. In Hebrew “Eve” is *Chava*, which can be translated “Life-giver.” In a particularly evocative sense, the mother of all the living draws her own being from biological and divine sources, from life and the source of life. Again, at the end of Chapter 3, just as God turns the remark “to dust shall you return” *toward* Adam, God can be seen deliberately to turn the remark *away* from Eve out of deference to her status as “mother of all the living,” as a bearer of life. While the character of Adam represents our individual return to dust, the character of Eve represents our enduring ability to sustain the life of our kind as part of the biological life of the earth.

Both sexes also derive from the divine. If we infer that *Adam* is male, then in his creation, the earth (*Adamah*) plays the female role, while God plays the male, providing the breath of life, symbolizing the seed. Conversely, in the creation of the woman, the human plays the male role, through the symbolism of the rib, while God plays the female role, in taking the symbolic seed and bringing forth from it a human being. Our biological genders are the bases for our sexual reproduction; they also link to the divine through our ability to create life.

I note in passing that no individual in Genesis is explicitly identified as being of a particular sex until the creation of the woman. In the second part, we may *infer* that *Adam* is male because that is the biological gender he has later. In the creation of the woman, the text “And the Lord God fashioned the rib that he had taken from the human into a woman” [2:22], is the first reference to an individual explicitly in terms of sex. The Hebrew word used here is “*ishah*,” in English “woman.” In the next verse, when the human says “She shall be called Woman [*ishah*] for from Man she was taken” [2:23], this is the first use of the Hebrew word for man, “*ish*.” Biological genders do not appear in this myth until the creation of the woman; they are, in a respect, born of her.

In all this, there is nothing that requires us to see the divine origin of human life as setting humans *above* the other animals or placing humans somehow beyond nature.

3. Technology and Nature

The creation and Eden myths depict our relationship to nature as profoundly technological. The text even defines human beings explicitly in terms of a technological role, that of caretakers of nature. More broadly, the treatment of our relationship to nature here includes a technological characterization of both human nature and the human condition—particularly when “technology” is understood to include both our instruments and our ability to deploy tools and techniques.

In the first Chapter immediately after humans are made, God’s first instructions to them, the first commandments in the text are: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it! Have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over all living things that crawl about upon the earth!” [1:28]. This is often taken to mean that humans are in a superior or dominant position in the worldly scheme of things; that our role is to dominate the earth and its wildlife, to do with them as suits our purposes. But the passage says nothing of the kind. Throughout Chapters One and Two, our actions toward nature are not defined in terms of domination and exploitation, but in terms of caretaking, especially the safeguarding of nature’s orderliness.

The term used in the text is not “to dominate” but “to have dominion” (the Hebrew “*v’yirdu*” suggests “to rule over” or “to take care of”). The distinction is important: having dominion over something is a matter of having it in one’s charge, of needing to see to its needs, stability, and orderliness. There is a model for this early in Chapter One where the creation of the sun and moon is described: “God said: Let there be lights in the dome of the heavens, to separate the day from the night, that they may be for signs—for set-times, for days and years, and they shall be lights in the dome of the heavens to provide light upon the earth! It was so. God made the two great lights, the greater light for ruling the day and the smaller light for ruling the night, and [God made] the stars” [1:14–16]. The sense here of the sun ruling over the day and the moon over the night is not that they can do with them as they please; rather, they represent the orderliness of nature in the passage of days, seasons, and years: they are signs for set times. And the term used in Hebrew “*l’memshelet*” suggests “to govern.”

The concern for orderliness is a basic theme throughout the creation story: at the opening of Genesis, God creates the heavens and the earth by bringing them out of chaos, establishing order out of what the text tells us was “without form and void” (or “wild and waste”) [1:2]. So when God says humans should “subdue” the earth and have dominion over it and its wildlife, there is a model already established for this in God’s actions: our relationship to nature should be one of attending to its stability and care, safeguarding orderliness over chaos. This concern with the dialectic of order and chaos is carried over to the social or public sphere beginning in Chapter 4 with the establishment of civil settlements.

In the Eden myth, the text says the human was put in the Garden “to till it and tend it” [2:15]. “Tilling” points to our working of the earth to derive our

own sustenance from it. "Tending" suggests our looking after the Garden's well-being, tending to the needs of nature itself. In Hebrew, "*u'l'shamrah*" suggests "to keep it" or "to preserve it vigilantly."

In comparison to the origin myths of many other cultures, the creation and Eden myths of Genesis are distinctively technological in character. Many origin myths are, quite understandably biological in character: a god or goddess, or many of them, or some great mythical being gives birth to the world and its creatures. The creation myth of Genesis, by contrast, is technological: the god of Genesis does not *beget* the heavens and the earth, but rather *makes* them. Likewise God *makes* the living things of the earth, including people. The god of the first three chapters of Genesis is a craftsman, a technologist akin to Stephen Daedalus's "old artificer." God is also law-giver and judge, but in these chapters of Genesis that role seems almost secondary to that of technologist. In fact, much of the work God does in these chapters is specifically craft-like, for it entails giving form to raw materials.

The opening passages of Genesis are often taken as an account of God creating the heavens and the earth out of nothing. Yet, the text does not require an *ex nihilo* interpretation at all. The opening reads: "As God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and void, darkness was over the face of the deep, the spirit of God wafted over the face of the waters—And God said: Let there be light! And there was light" [1:1–3].

The references to the earth being formless and void do not describe what God created, but the state of things at the time of creation. God did not make a formless and void earth, but began to create by giving form to that pre-existing stuff, much as a potter gives form to clay.⁵ God sets about to do just this in a number of ways. God makes things distinct from one another: light from darkness, water from water, land from water, etc. This is a process of pulling out of the formless, chaotic void something that has a discernible form (as suggested above, it is a matter of "subduing" chaos by bringing forth order). God also creates the animals out of the pre-existing dust of the earth, and humans out of pre-existing material and biological stuff. The text speaks (in both English and Hebrew) of God creating in productive, craft-like terms: God "made" the sun and the moon, the beasts and the human species of the first telling; in the second chapter God "formed" Adam and "fashioned" or "crafted" Eve.

In these myths, humans are also seen as craftsmen. This is evident in our being made in the image of God: God is technological, so are we. And being makers of things is not simply a matter of humans mimicking the divine, nor is it merely something we happen to do. It is intrinsic to human identity and human nature. When God first states the intention to create humankind, God says, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness. They shall have dominion over the fish of the sea," etc. [1:26]. Humans are imagined and defined as a species with the craft of being caretakers and shapers of the world. A few lines later, immediately after humankind is created, the first thing God

says to them is, “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it” [1:28]. We are given the charge, the commandment, to follow the example of God in establishing order.

When the man and the woman departed from Eden, they entered the human condition. Before that, they were living under circumstances quite different from ours. Leaving the garden is a mythical answer to the question, “How did the human condition come to be?” And the answer suggests that the human condition itself is a technological one. At the beginning of their departure from the Garden, upon eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the first thing the man and the woman did was to begin making things: they made clothes. Later, when God scolds Adam at their exit from the garden, God defines, in part, the human condition: “By the sweat of your brow shall you procure bread to eat” [3:19].

The role technology plays in our relationship to nature is intimately part of the human condition, ours is a technological relationship: we draw our very sustenance from the earth through the technics of agriculture. In the creation and Eden myths, both human nature and the human condition are essentially technological. They treat technology not as something we happen to do but as something intimately bound up with who we are within the world in which we find ourselves. We are essentially technicians, shapers of the world and of ourselves.

God also serves as a model of a maker of things as God creates by way of proclaiming. This is seen in the formula familiar in the text: “And God said X, and it was so.” God speaks things into existence. Once again, this is not creating something out of nothing, but proclaiming that a form is to take shape out of pre-existing substances. Clearly, we cannot bring form to substance by speaking. But we do create the world of meaning and relationship through language. When the human proclaims the names of the animals, he is making orderly distinctions among them and creating a relationship with them by way of establishing “kinds,” just as God makes orderly distinctions between light and dark, water and dry land—which God then also names. Language for us is both a distinguishing factor of our kind and one of our most powerful tools.

There is a further point that can be mentioned in this connection. The passage concerning the naming of the animals says, “whatever the human called it as a living being, that became its name.” Why is the phrase “as a living being” in the text? Perhaps this is to suggest that the human’s act of naming was not an act of creating life. The creation of life is solely done by God. Among the peoples of the ancient Levant, giving and intoning names often carried important powers, including the determining of one’s character and destiny. The text here may be taken to emphasize that humans, though having the power of establishing order and relationship through speech, do not have the power to create life—humans can sustain the life of our species, but cannot create another species “as a living being.” (This is, of course, an issue to ponder in the face of recent advances in genetic engineering.)

4. Technology and Responsibility

The man and the woman were expelled from the Garden of Eden because they sinned by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Seen in another way, they entered the human condition by acquiring the power of moral judgment. Whether sin or not, the myth defines us as knowers of good and evil, and calls upon us to bring this knowledge to bear on the exercise of our technological powers.

God told *Adam* not to eat from the tree, under penalty of death [2:17]. The serpent told Eve that if they ate from the tree they would become like gods, knowing good and evil [3:5]. The serpent was right. It is through this act of the woman, through her initiative, that humans become like gods in becoming moral judges. That is, it is through woman that humans are “born” into the human condition.⁶

Maimonides says that the story of the tree tells us why we possess the ability to make judgments of value (moral, aesthetic, etc.). Prior to eating from the tree, he argues, the only power we had was rationality, and that alone is insufficient for dealing with our many appetites and pleasures, especially in a world filled with so many things appealing to the senses.⁷ Acquiring the power of moral judgment was necessary to balance human nature, given the human condition.

The two most prominent characteristics of the human condition in the creation and Eden myths are our having the power of moral judgment and our being makers of things. There is an important connection between the two. Throughout the account of creation (which culminates in Shabbat, the seventh day of rest), at the end of each day’s tasks, God judges the work to be good. If we are to presume to emulate God in being makers of things, these myths tell us that we should “become like gods” as well in being judges of the moral worth of our technological works.

The text offers two guidelines for how this may be done. The first is our responsibility, when wielding our technological power in the interests of our own sustenance, also always to act as caretakers of nature, to tend and keep nature itself. The second is found in the theme of limits that appears throughout both accounts. The “expulsion” is associated with the man and the woman transgressing the only limit imposed on them in the Garden. After leaving the garden, God characterizes the human powers of self-sustenance within the human condition, not in terms of limitlessness, but as constrained by the pains of labor. For Adam this is the sustenance of individuals, when God says “by the sweat of your brow shall you procure bread to eat” [3:19]. For Eve, it is the pains of her labor (literally) in sustaining the species by giving birth.

The theme of being able to draw sustenance from nature by following imposed limits is echoed throughout Jewish law and custom. The Jewish agricultural laws and practices are almost exclusively established by ways that entail the imposition of limits. One can work the soil every day, except one must rest on the Sabbath (when even one’s animals are to be given rest!). Fields may be harvested, but not totally: a portion of the corners must be left for the

gleaners, the needy. The land may be worked, but every seventh year it must be left to lie fallow. Every fiftieth year is a Jubilee during which not only is the land allowed again to rest, but, quite symbolically, each landholder is to return possession of that land to the previous owner. Ultimately this is to be done, God says “. . . for the land is Mine; you are but sojourners and residents with Me” (Leviticus 25:23). A similar expression is found in the line from Psalm 24, “The earth is the Lord’s as is the fullness thereof.” Such passages ought to give some weight to countering the prevalent notion that the message conveyed by the Hebrew Bible is that the earth is a human possession.

In this interpretation of the creation and Eden myths, our relationship to nature is seen as intimate. We are depicted as earth-creatures who depend on the earth for our very sustenance, individually and as a species. Human nature and the human condition define us as technological beings, working the material and biological stuff of the earth so to be fruitful and to multiply. Yet, we also have the responsibility to be subduers of chaos, guardians of order, and always to act within limits. Our ability to fulfill this responsibility rests with our having become knowers of good and evil: we are empowered by this to judge the moral worth of our technological works.

Never in human history has *Tikun Olam*, the healing of the world, as the essential tenet of Jewish responsibility, carried a greater sense of urgency with respect to our relationship to nature than it does today. And never have the creation and Eden narratives, the first of all Jewish texts, been a more fitting guide.

NOTES

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 2. For their careful reading of various drafts of this material, the author is indebted to Professors Murray Baumgarten, Michael Caspi, Arnold Eisen, Dvora Yanow, Dr. Ellen Birnbaum, and Rabbis Daniel Shevitz and Albert Yanow.

2. I have benefited from Professor Dvora Yanow’s work in appreciating the value of myths in understanding current social issues. See Dvora Yanow, “Silences in Public Policy Discourse: Organizational and Policy Myths,” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (October 1992).

3. The numbers in brackets refer to the chapter and verse in the text. The translations given here are syntheses of those of the Jewish Publication Society, the King James, and Standard Revised versions, and, in particular, Everett Fox’s delightful and poetic rendering (Fox, Everett, *In the Beginning: A New English Rendition of the Book of Genesis* [New York: Schocken Books, 1983]). I am also indebted to Professor Dvora Yanow for guidance on the translation of several key words and phrases. However, in all instances I assume responsibility for the specific English used.

4. Arendt, 1958, p. 8.

5. A possible exception is the creation of light. Yet light, both symbolically and scientifically, is perhaps the exemplar of the insubstantial in the physical world.

6. There are important suggestions here, both in the characterization of the powers of the woman and in the symbolism of the fruit and the snake of the incorporation of goddess myths, as is found in traditional literatures and current Jewish feminist studies.

7. Moses Maimonides, *A Guide for the Perplexed*, translated by Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

Mortality

We don't think we're waiting for the end,
but the end is waiting.

The mind cultivates its flaws
like an oyster.

You and I are not like the effortless ones
who are there already.
Not anything like them.

When the circuit breaks
we grope for the matches and candles.

After each night we wake
without detachment,
still needing each other.

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Midrash, Bible, and Women's Voices

N O R M A R O S E N

THE STORYTELLING ASPECT OF MIDRASH—CHARMING OR exasperating, stolidly obtuse or wonderfully insightful—is what we are concerned with here.

In the vast compilation of Bible commentary known as midrash, much of it embedded in Talmud, only one genre, *aggadah*, is concerned with storytelling. Another, *halakhah*, addresses scripture with an eye to its legal aspects. It is usual to make this distinction between the two. The Bible was concerned with setting forth an ethical basis for the life of the ancient Hebrews, backed by the force of *halakhah*, Jewish law. Yet it is not always possible or desirable to make a hard distinction between the *halakhic* aspect of midrash and *aggadot*, stories. Both shaped our Jewish sense of ourselves. It is important to see what moral and cultural lessons were taught by Bible stories and their commentaries. Many of the commentaries, particularly those expressing attitudes toward women, became the basis of tradition, carrying legal force. How do those meanings strike us now?

Moral truths—as embodied in the Ten Commandments, for example—are eternal. But we have only to read the midrashic scholars to see (if we weren't convinced of it already) how great an effort every generation must make to give morality the necessary irresistible force of revelation, if it is to be a living source of ethical energy and not merely a curiosity of ancient times.

The midrashists—the word midrash comes from the Hebrew *lidrosh*, to search, to ask, to explain, to draw out, to enlarge upon—seized upon improbabilities, gaps. These spaces lying open in the text set the scholars to dreaming, to imagining answers to their own questions. Often, the ancient commentators invented whole new tales that not only explained but extended biblical narratives.

Midrash that specifically addresses the stories of the Bible—*aggadot*—does so in various ways. It may use analysis, logical deduction, proofs by comparison, or “prooftexts,” passages culled from other texts and interwoven with the passage under study. And often it adds more story to the story. These added-on stories were sometimes invented by scholars in the heat of discussion, sometimes gleaned from legends and embellished with more comment.

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Eric Auerbach's *Mimesis* notes that the Hebrew Bible in its terseness expresses moral teaching above all, in contrast to Homer's storytelling mode in *The Odyssey*, where details abound and aesthetics predominate over ethics. The Bible offers a detail-less simplicity and almost unbearable tension. This is how Auerbach describes the *Akedah*, the binding of Isaac by his father Abraham: "Serving-men, ass, wood, and knife, and nothing else, without an epithet; they are there to serve the end which God has commanded."

For Rebekah, the well; for Isaac, the binding. She was generous and life-giving, he was nearly sacrificed. That is all the background the Bible accords this bride and groom, progenitors of biblical Jews, mother and father to our sacral selves.

It may be because Bible stories *are* as terse and as given to moral teaching as Auerbach describes that midrash was born. Some traditional midrashim that comment on Bible stories with these narratives, *aggadot*, elaborate on the stories with an interweaving of astonishing detail.

What is equally astonishing is that these midrashim do not always appear to express moral teaching. Or if they do, not in a way easily come upon. Sometimes detail reinforces the original intention of the Bible story. At other times it pulls the story in some other direction. The results can be seemingly absurd and gratuitous linkings, or marvels of insight.

The medieval Jewish poet Samuel ha-Nagid said, "Each one explained the verse according to his fancy and according to what came into his mind." All the same, says another source, "If you wish to get to know the One by whose word the world came into being—study the *aggadah*."

To which I add the question, if you not only study the *aggadah* but write some midrash yourself—what then?

What I Want Midrash To Do

What I want midrash to do is pick out the questions that have lain dormant and unnoticed in the story for 1,000 years, like rich archaeological treasure, or the bone of some paleontological missing link fossilizing under layers of shale.

I want midrash to give a voice to women in the Bible who have had nearly none. To be an advocate for biblical figures over whom the ages have kicked considerable dust, and to imagine their lives. To try to see, for example, what events might have changed Rebekah from a sheltered, passive girl to a determined, goal-oriented woman who could take covenantal succession upon herself. To raise new questions and add them to those the midrashists have already asked, and to attempt new answers.

How is it that Rebekah didn't know about the great drama of Isaac's life, the *Akedah*, Isaac's near-sacrifice by his father? It hardly answers to say that the story was intended to put an end to child sacrifice, and since Isaac was not killed that is all that need concern us. A narrative once set in motion is no longer entirely in the control of its author. It takes on its own life; its integrity demands that narrative lines be followed to the end. Narrative can act like the golem in

the famous sixteenth-century legend, the giant manlike construction said to have been created by Rabbi Judah of Prague to protect the Jews. It was created for one purpose, but its own energies drove it to rampage wherever it could.

And so the text cries out for us to imagine what life was like for Rebekah when she found out the secret of that day on Mount Moriah when Isaac was bound to the altar and Abraham stood above him with a knife. What happened after she made the discovery?

And what of the response of Isaac's mother, Sarah, to the *Akedah*? We are never in Sarah's presence again after that near-fatal episode. What if Sarah knew of Abraham's intention? What might Sarah have done?

As for Rachel and Leah, what was it really like for sisters to share a husband and compete for his sexual favors so they could bear sons? Could they ever resolve their rivalry? A wonderful midrash has come down to us from *Lamentations Rabba*: Rachel, to spare Leah humiliation on her wedding night, when Jacob thought he was sleeping not with Leah but with his beloved Rachel, hid under the bed. When Jacob spoke to Leah, Rachel answered in her own voice from under the bed.

As sometimes happens, the answer to one question raises another question that is even harder to answer. This beautiful and sensitive midrash is at the same time incredibly insensitive, because it never wonders what on earth it could have been like for Rachel to be under that bed, or Leah to be on it.

What questions can we ask about Lot's daughters, who procured their father's seed in the good cause of procreation, thinking they were the last beings left on earth, or about Tamar, who posed as a harlot to usurp her father-in-law's seed for a similarly desperate reason?

Or about Miriam, heroine of Exodus, who was honored yet by-passed and punished beyond the bounds of anything imposed on other members of that family of prophets, who were so pleasing and at the same time so irritating to God?

We know a good deal about the private lives of Abraham, of Jacob, of Isaac, of Moses, of Joseph. But what do we know about the private life of Deborah, a woman of powerful public position, a general and a judge? What *could* her private life have been like in that era?

And what of Esther, whose story ends in political triumph, but who is left, at the end, still sacrificed to the swinishly swilling Ahasuerus. What happened when the trumpets of triumph fell silent?

Stories from the Hebrew Bible are the cultural heritage of western civilization. Women of the Bible, particularly in their familial and societal relationships—Sarah, Rachel, Leah, Rebekah, Ruth, Esther, Tamar, Deborah, and others, named and unnamed—hold powerful places in our imaginations.

I would like to turn things about. What if those Bible women had knowledge of us? How would they tell us their stories?

This is a book made up of such tellings about a selected group of women of the Bible, often in their own imagined voices. Above all, I want to suggest

possibilities for new points of view, to create a narrative climate that will draw readers to participate creatively in the asking of new questions and the imagining of new answers, new midrashim. These new narratives should be exciting and unexpected as well—good storytelling. In this way I am trying to bring biblical narratives in which women figure closer to our contemporary interests, ironies, and needs without, I hope, losing their original power.

Implicit in these new stories is a dialogue with the ancient commentators, the midrashists. The time- and place-bound parameters of their views of women are contrasted with contemporary concerns. The questions they asked—or failed to ask—about these powerful but cryptic narratives can be offset by the questions readers now want to ask and to have answered.

The Lost Voice of Women

In numbers of individuals, families, potential genetic inheritance, in stories, sermons, and studies, the rich-threaded fabric of lived lives lost in the lost Jews of the Holocaust, one and a half million of them children, we read our bankruptcy amid new Jewish flowering. I believe we must, sadly, add to that loss the millennial prohibition against the voices of women in traditional Jewish culture and religious writing.

Where are the texts they might have left us, the variety of voices they might have lent to the sound of Jewish thought? Our ranks impoverished, we cannot ourselves go on thinning them by leaving out the female voice, by denying her turn to speak.

To give biblical women a voice is not merely to do a feminist reparational reading and writing. It is to attempt some fractional hint at those voices that might have been heard had our losses not been so great historically and culturally.

If we understand that we must as never before allow the voices of women to be heard now, in the present, we must also see the necessity of plunging into the past to release our ancient mothers from embedded silence, to retrieve them through imagination.

We Know More Midrash Than We Think

In Egypt, the enslaved male Hebrews had to work all night. Their wives came to them in secret in order to conceive. But then they were faced with Pharaoh's terrible edict of death to their infant sons. Therefore when the women gave birth, the children went into the earth where they flourished until they could burst out again in full-grown health.

Before I had any knowledge of this or any other midrash, I wrote in my novel, *Touching Evil*, originally published in 1969, a fantasy cherished by one of the characters in that book. All the Jewish children in Europe about to be destroyed by the Nazis were magically taken up into the wombs of their mothers again and kept there safe until deliverance.

The rabbis of the early centuries invented and perfected midrash, but if they hadn't, we'd have done it ourselves. The need, the wish, the dream of altering reality is as strong in us as is hunger or thirst.

Models of the Past

For inspiration we have many classic midrashic traditions. I want to cite two here, so strong they burn themselves into the text. One is the story of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar. Midrash takes up the case of Hagar, the concubine who bore Abraham's first son Ishmael, and whom Sarah later banished with her son, causing readers to worry ever afterward about the compassion of the Matriarch and the ethics of the Bible. When Sarah dies, Abraham takes as wife a woman the Bible calls Keturah. Midrash picks up these open strands of the story, weaves them together, and tells us that Keturah turns out to be none other than Hagar! Thus midrash provides a new ending of unmistakable rightness, giving release to pent-up ethical and narrative tensions.

The other midrashic addition is found in the story of Esther, or rather of Vashti. She is summoned to the court by the King and refuses to appear. Therefore Vashti is banished, and room made for Esther to enter the story and become the favorite of Ahasuerus. From that position she derives the power to overcome Haman, the evil plotter against the Jews. A midrash in *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* adds that Vashti is commanded to appear naked. And that is wonderful but puzzling. Wonderful because it deepens the character of Vashti, whose sense of personal dignity is heroic, against the odds of such times. Puzzling because it diminishes by contrast the stature of Esther, who is in fact the one who ultimately, as the favorite of the harem, will be forced to appear naked before the king and his court. (No, the Bible text doesn't say so, but that does not preclude the inevitable from occurring.) Esther has no thought for personal dignity, and though she is supremely courageous and cunningly creative on behalf of the threatened Jews, her personal story is shadowed by the story of Vashti, who forthrightly refuses to collaborate in her own degradation.

The question remains: Why did the rabbis embellish Vashti's story in this way? Maybe they wanted only to emphasize the sordid excesses of the court. Whatever their reasons, as a result something happens to the subtext of the Esther narrative that remains one of the glories of detail- and story-enhancing midrash.

Narrative Method in Classical Midrash

In the Jewish religious world, time conflates, collapses. There is no before and no after. That miraculous simultaneity stems from the rabbinic idea that all of *Tanakh*—the entire Hebrew Bible: five Books of Moses, Prophets, and Writings—as well as later rabbinic commentary on it, was revealed at Sinai.

Interestingly, this ancient declaration of faith meets itself again in the latest scientific theories about time: If you venture out far enough into the realm

of quantum physics, there also you encounter no limitation of time, no before and no after. There you find the simultaneity of the rabbis.

A superb example of this approach, this midrashic magic realism of time conflation, can be seen in the following legend. The second-century sage, Rabbi Akiva, refers reverentially back nearly ten centuries to the wisdom of Moses who would, says Akiva, have been able to explain the meaning of the crowned letters of the Torah. At the same moment, in order to learn the meaning of those crowned letters himself, Moses listens in at the Academy where Rabbi Akiva expounds on the mystery of the crowns above the letters, ascribing their ancient secret knowledge to Moses!

On a less exalted level, but one of no less importance to the midrashic rabbis, was the troublesome matter of the long journey on which Eliezer the messenger escorted Rebekah from her home in Haran toward marriage to Isaac in Canaan. What about the sexual temptations, the rabbis wondered, of such prolonged proximity? What about protecting Rebekah's virginity? If you were heavenly ruler for a day, how would you take care of matters? Would you say that Rebekah's hymen became miraculously impenetrable? Or that Eliezer suffered from impotence for the duration of the journey? Or that a plague of sealed apertures descended on the travel party so that they were incapable of any movement except eating, evacuating, and riding their camels? The rabbis called on all these possibilities to explain other cases, but in this instance they contented themselves with saying that for safety's sake, God shortened the trip of many days to a mere few hours, and no nights at all.

This conflating of time gives wonderful license. I have availed myself of it to infuse women of the Bible with a contemporary knowledge and sensibility. We are present in their own time, and they are here in ours.

Narrative Method and the Uses of Story

Although some Bible stories may have been presented for nation-building reasons—the covenant of land (Abraham) and the redemption of the hopeless and despised (Sarah, becoming fecund in her barren old age)—the narrative nevertheless takes on a life of its own. Abraham and Sarah have become a real married couple, quarreling about other bed-mates and clashing on how to bring up the children. They have come to represent qualities other than those intended.

One thinks of Shaker furniture, carved in austere utility for the most practical use, but in the process acquiring aesthetic dimensions. So these biblical characters, placed on a page to teach religious, national, and societal traditions governing everything from covenantal succession to female subservience, take on subtexts of astonishing depths. Into these depths the midrashist plunges, drawing forth fresh treasure.

In some narratives, I take my cue from the traditional midrashists themselves (as well as from contemporary fictional techniques) to make a collage rather than a single linear narrative. More than one view of character

is possible. More than one time setting for a story. More than one way for the narrative to go, and it may go in all those ways simultaneously. More than one resolution may be found.

“What doesn’t happen in reality happens in dreams; if not in this life, then in some other.” In his transcendent story, “Gimpel the Fool,” I. B. Singer puts these words into the mouth of Gimpel, a born midrashist if ever there was one.

Kabbalah describes the various aspects of God: Human events may be governed by one of God’s aspects this time, another aspect another time. Consistency, which we deem a great good in bringing up our children, is not always available to God’s children. This quotidian lack brings compensation; as a source of narrative surprise, no one could ask for more. “What can possibly happen next?” is as urgent a life question as a fictional one.

Midrash and Fiction

For as long as there have been storytellers, there has been trouble with ending stories. Some tellers may be a little self-conscious about beginning, but that’s as nothing compared with ending. No wonder the end of a story is daunting: It requires your own version of philosophy, psychology, cultural history, theology, and world view, all wrapped in one. The end of a story is a moment of truth, not only about the elements of the story, but about you, the storyteller—what you are and what you believe.

As a writer of fiction, I am struck by the way in which the midrashic writing of the rabbis resembles the creation of fiction, with one important exception. Midrash, unlike writers’ revisions, comes *after* the final story version, the one already in the Bible canon.

The rabbis took narrative already set, known, and codified, and felt free to make variations. If they didn’t quite change the endings, they sometimes added episodes or details that so altered the overall tonality of a story that it is felt as a new entity, as in the story of Abraham and Hagar.

Much of what the rabbis did with midrash resembles the fiction-writing impulse. Midrashists ask themselves about motivation for what the characters do. What the text omits, they try to supply, sometimes imagining themselves into the feelings of a character. Accounting for discrepancies in the story, they make events plausible.

But midrash can also sometimes seem like alternative drafts of a Bible story. It still insists on its right to imagine what might have been, as if each character continued to possess countless possibilities beyond its Bible definition. Midrash can give voice to radically skeptical views; midrash can appear to deconstruct, though by its own lights it is reconstructing. Classical midrash positions itself within the tradition of revelation, which is what makes its practice of inventing variations on biblical lives so startling—until, that is, we understand that revelation is seen by the midrashists to be ongoing, and to include what they themselves at that moment are saying: Having come to understand the process, we can still be astonished by the contents of the variations.

To take the case of Rebekah, we have already seen what the rabbis conjectured about the long trip to Canaan that Rebekah, Isaac's bride-to-be, took in the company of Eliezer the servant. It was dangerous. Isaac's past made him suspicious, midrash shrewdly goes on (that near-slaughter by his father). He would wonder if the servant behaved improperly on the way. No doubt, the midrashists said, the journey was miraculously speeded up to a matter of mere hours for safety's sake.

Yet sometimes midrash can make connections of startling insight that deepen characters and the meanings of their relationships, through the use of that same unbridled and unintimidated imagination. The midrash on the Genesis story of Abraham taking Hagar as a wife after Sarah's death is the magnificent illustration here.

The Bible text occasionally capitulates to the power of two different versions of an event, as in the double creation story. In one version God creates Adam and Eve at the same time. In the other, God first creates Adam from the earth and then Eve from Adam's rib. The Redactor, who welded together the various Bible accounts, allowed both creation stories to stand, thus making new resonances. Some midrash is of such great power that it will, in the reader's mind, be taken together with Bible story, again making it resonate anew.

Midrash and Theology

The midrashists lived in the dark era that followed the destruction of the Second Temple. We live in a time sick with Holocaust consciousness. *The Book of Lamentations*, read every year on Tisha B'Av, the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av, is filled with scenes of suffering and despair. But the ancient commentators were able to say that the suffering caused by the Roman sack of Jerusalem was a result of Jewish sinning. A mind that could conceive of the Holocaust as punishment for Jewish sin would be a mind so filled with the ancient faith as to divorce it utterly from our own time.

In an earlier midrash on Jonah, included in my collected essays, *Accidents of Influence: Writing as a Woman and a Jew in America*, I addressed the question of the reluctant prophet. The traditional view of Jonah calls him a man obsessed with judgment who despises mercy. He won't go to the people of Nineveh to prophesy their doom because he knows God's mercy will ensure their forgiveness. Jonah, says the commentary, wants only judgment; God wants only mercy. In my midrash, Jonah in the belly of the fish encounters a kind of living theater. For three days, scenes of Holocaust destruction of the Jews pass before his eyes. By the end of three days, when the big fish ejects him, he's still no more inclined to go to Nineveh than before. Not, this time around, because he believes God will be too merciful, but rather because he cannot bear the idea of a God who is neither judgmental nor merciful but merely absent. To live a late-twentieth-century life is to live in a time of broken faith lines, of discontinuity. Midrash is a counterweighting commentary in the service of continuity, of faith in the primacy of Jewish text.

To find in oneself the capacity to be mindful of the gift of creation, to feel grateful to God for the gift of life, is already to have found a way to God. The kaddish, recited by those who mourn a death, is a prayer of praise to God. Those who in their deep grief recite the words of prayer are already taking comfort, the comfort of being able to speak the words.

This seeming paradox might be better named “A Progress toward God.” If we can create the comfort of God, God will comfort us. Evil manifestly exists. And God, goodness, virtue, and mercy exist. But these we must create anew, call into being, summon by being deeply, passionately mindful of them. And sometimes, alas, we can best summon this deep and passionate mindfulness at times of deepest grief. Midrash, like prayer at its truest, is an activist response to existential despair.

SARAH

Genesis 18:11–14

And Sarah laughed to herself saying, “Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment—with my husband so old?” Then the Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am?’ Is anything too wondrous for the Lord? I will return to you at the time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.”

Genesis 21:9–13

Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing. She said to Abraham, “Cast out that slave-woman and her son, for the son of that slave shall not share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.” The matter distressed Abraham greatly, for it concerned a son of his. But God said to Abraham, “Do not be distressed over the boy or your slave; whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you. As for the son of the slave-woman, I will make a nation of him, too, for he is your seed.”

Genesis 22:1–3

Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, “Abraham,” and he answered, “Here I am.” And He said, “Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you.”

Commentary

In Sarah’s narrative, as in others, some traditional midrash seems *imprinted* on the Bible story: That Sarah taught Torah in her tent as Abraham did in his. That Sarah saw Ishmael in sexually indecent behavior with Isaac and therefore wanted Ishmael banished. That she died just after the *Akedah*, and her cries when she heard of it are the sounds of grief the shofar makes on Yom Kippur, the one high-pitched cry that goes on and on, and the broken stuttering cries.

Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer tells us that the serpent who betrayed Eve in the Garden of Eden was the one who told Sarah that Abraham had sacrificed Isaac. She “cried aloud three times and gave three howlings” and died.

With so much richness already in place, why does Sarah need new midrash? For one thing, the rabbis don’t ask the question that seems obvious to us: How could Sarah, who taught Torah alongside Abraham, who heard God’s voice clearly the first time when God announced the birth of Isaac, not know of God’s ordering Abraham to sacrifice Isaac? Knowing, how could she not act?

Sarah was 90 years old when she conceived a child. She laughed at the divine announcement and wasn’t the only one who had trouble believing it could happen. People said that Isaac was Hagar’s son, too. That it was Hagar who had borne this second son by Abraham, as she had Ishmael, the first one.

As if to refute this tale, another came into being to tell us that Sarah had so much milk she was able to nurse 100 babies when she gave birth. Compared to the miracle of conception at the age of 90, such abundance of milk may be a minor manifestation. Inappropriate, though, and inconvenient. God doesn’t know limits; we have to. “Did you think I wanted *that*?” we can imagine Sarah protesting.

There is much that is inappropriate in Sarah’s story. Abraham felt forced to say she was his sister so that he would not be killed when Pharaoh took Sarah into his harem (Genesis 20:2). And this, midrash tells us, was because she possessed such physical beauty that her radiance shone through whatever coverings Abraham used to conceal her when they passed through the desert.

Hagar, Pharaoh’s daughter by a concubine (*Genesis Rabba*), was the handmaid given to Sarah by Pharaoh. Sarah then gave Hagar as concubine to Abraham, who conceived Ishmael. Midrash adds that Abraham loved Ishmael’s “playing and dancing,” and Sarah was jealous for Isaac’s sake. Was her Isaac perhaps not a lively fellow? A little clumsy, a little slow, not agile enough to elude Abraham when he bound him to the altar? Maybe the ram gave more trouble than Isaac did!

Sarah swore she was Abraham’s sister to save her husband’s life. What wouldn’t she have done to save her son’s? Her relationship to God was as intimate as Abraham’s. Though not mentioned specifically, Sarah must have been present at the setting forth of the covenants, since God’s instructions about the covenant of circumcision were clearly passed down through women: witness Zipporah’s ability to circumcise Moses’ son (Exodus 4:25).

So zealous a mother, so careful a hearer and watcher of God—how can we not wonder why Sarah wasn’t an active intervener in the *Akedah*? For those of us who wonder, “The Unbinding of Sarah” follows.

The Unbinding of Sarah

It is not generally talked about, but on that dark journey up to Mount Moriah where Abraham was to sacrifice his son to God, Sarah also went along.

Naturally, she would go.

In the night she heard the voice in Abraham's tent saying, "Take your son and sacrifice him." It was a voice she recognized. That voice and Sarah had laughed together!

Sarah rushed into Abraham's tent, but Abraham waved her away. No talk! No time to listen! Preparations to make!

He had been more attentive when he sent Hagar from the house with Ishmael. He had been more reluctant to expel *them*. He had caressed *that* mother, kissed *that* child.

Now he pointed his finger away from himself and without another word or gesture expelled Sarah from his tent.

But Sarah stayed to argue. Naturally, she would do that. Maybe Abraham didn't know, maybe he hadn't understood? No one disputed that Abraham was a good man, but it didn't do at times like these to be too quick to obey! And since Abraham could think of a hundred questions to put to God about the sinners of Sodom and Gomorrah, surely he might have thought of one or two about their son?

"If you had no questions," Sarah cried, "why didn't you just laugh out loud?"

The busy Patriarch moved about the tent. His ears, having filled with God's voice, could take in nothing else. Preparing, preparing! He knew when to take God seriously. When to question, when to be silent.

And when to lie! Who knew that better than the two of them? Years ago it had been. "Save my life!" he'd begged. "Let me tell Pharaoh you are my sister, not wife. We will ask God's intervention, and you may be untouched. But even if Pharaoh should take you, it is my life, my life!"

She had not refused him. Abraham had led her as his sister into Pharaoh's palace, past the barbarous guards with flashing swords. Each antechamber was darker than the one before. In the darkening light of the torches' smoky gleam, she passed first through a chamber hung in gold and the green of the sea; next, through one of gold and the blue of heaven; the last was a chamber of gold and the red of blood.

In each room she trembled. In the room of green and gold she whispered, "Are you with me, Abraham?" And her husband answered, "Here I am." In the room of blue and gold she asked, "Are you here, Abraham?" "Yes, I am here." And in the room of red and gold she cried out, "Where are you, Abraham?" But there was no answer. Eunuchs had already seized her, pulled her through the door, and left Abraham outside. Within she was bathed, oiled, perfumed, and brought naked, with bells on her ankles and fine gauze scarves floating about her face, to Pharaoh. Later, God's plague descended and Pharaoh's women could not bear. But that was later. Always that little time lag before catching God's attention. Her husband had once more agreed to something to save his life and was telling the lie this time to her! Who could be sure when matters would come to God's attention?

During the night Sarah dreams of Hagar. There is no limit to the questions Sarah asks then.

—When death stalked your son in the desert, didn't you utter some prayer, some special supplication, that brought God's mercy down? You, whose son survived, can't you teach me words that give such blessing?

Hagar, no longer handmaid, is decked in full Egyptian robes and tasselling. She stares outward sybil-like, enthroned. In the perversity of dreams, she is now possessed of Sarah's former youth and beauty.

—I offer you aid, former mistress, Hagar answers. Not as measure of my love, but of my power. Your plight's more severe than mine. You, a mortal woman, wished my son's death. God himself desires the death of yours. Here's advice, voice of experience—submit! If you're worthy, reap reward and rescue. Otherwise, your son's as good as dead.

—Is that all?

—Yes, all.

—No words? No prayer? You, the inventor of prayer?

Sarah turns to go, then turns again. She falls to her knees. Weeps. Begs for Isaac's life.

—You must remember? Act or prayer? Hagar, something else you must have done!

The shocking dream scene! Sarah's embrace of her former handmaid's knees. Hagar's repulsion, with movements of feet, of her former mistresses' arms!

—I am about to impart the secret knowledge! Hagar intones.

But then the dream dissolves.

Sarah seeks Eliezer, faithful servant, Abraham's messenger. Him, too, she plies with questions Abraham will not allow.

"How can it be the life of Isaac God wants? He is the son God *gave* me! Why give a son, then take away? Is there some other truth we ought to guess at? What does God expect this frightful message will make us understand? If we understand, will we fathom to benigner meaning? Speak, messenger!"

Eliezer answers with care. "Messages are often longer than we think. Some go on so long whole wells run dry."

"Didn't I laugh when God promised a child? I laughed at the knowledge that I would not be allowed to keep him. I laughed, foreseeing bitter birth pains. My laugh was a vow to not love this borrowed boy, soon to be returned. Yet I was as helpless as if I'd never vowed, ready to sacrifice a bondwoman's son to save my own. See how life reflects our deeds! If I had not sent Hagar's son to banishment, might God now choose him for sacrifice and spare mine? Is that God's message? Speak, messenger!"

Eliezer replies, "I have already dreamed a journey Abraham sends me on. There is water in it. Water often means life. I remember feasting at the end."

"Did you feast as Abraham's inheritor? Once, Eliezer, you were near inheritor of Abraham, who had no son. Then two were born. One son

vanished. Is the second to follow? Will Eliezer inherit at last? Speak! Speak!"

"If so, it would be misery to Eliezer. He is no Abraham, and has no wish to hear direct from God. Let his master pass God's word along in tasks, in praise for work well done. Let Eliezer inherit a night's sleep, and let the sons of Abraham live and strengthen, endure ordeals, if they must, from God!"

"Yet were you, in your dream, the inheritor of Abraham's house? Messenger, you must speak!"

"I was myself, a servant. Trusted on great errands. When I woke, my heart filled with joy. I had done my task, traveled far and yet remained in my true place as one into whose ear Abraham, who has the ear of God, pours messages."

Still Sarah will not let Eliezer go.

"Is there some other sacrifice God would accept? For this only son of mine—10 first-born bullocks? 20 finest kids of the herd? 30 sheep? 40 heifers? 50 fledgling birds? Or your son, Eliezer? Speak, messenger!"

But Eliezer is struck dumb.

In the morning, Sarah also took provisions, mounted a donkey, and rode to Mount Moriah. Naturally, she would do that.

No more questions. Her son had been 90 years coming, 40 years growing. Her only son, Isaac, whom she loved. She followed them.

Now and then Abraham looked back and saw her. He shouted something and the wind blew it over his shoulder. He made pushing-away movements with his arm. Sarah kept on. Naturally, she would.

Whenever she lost sight of them she called out to wayfarers, "Have you seen my beloved? I beg you to tell me which way he's gone!"

After a while she saw that Abraham and Isaac had dismounted their donkeys and were already climbing the stony mountain on foot.

"I am coming, beloved," she shouted to her son, so that he would understand nothing could harm him. But as she urged her donkey forward, the beast stumbled and stopped. She felt its trembling in her thighs. Something was in the path.

She saw nothing. No snake or scorpion. But she continued to feel between her thighs the shudders of the little donkey. Sarah and the donkey both trembled before the empty air of nothing on the path.

Then there were warm puffs of air on her cheek. The nothing on the path was drawing closer.

"Where are you, Sarah?" came a voice at her ear.

"Here I am, God, hurrying toward my husband and my only son, with whom you blessed my old age. Up there"—Sarah pointed urgently—"they're coming to the top!"

"Stop a bit. It's a long while since we've talked together. In fact, not since the day you heard prophecy that you would bear that same son. I'm afraid, Sarah, that you failed to take it seriously. You laughed."

"Did I? Such things escape my memory these days. Since you say so, of course I humbly apologize for it. But the truth, if you remember, is that I was already 90 years old. Past a woman's time for that."

"Have I shown myself partial to the young? On the contrary! In long, barren periods I age my chosen women. Then I come to them with creation. What is time to me, Sarah, woman's or man's?"

"True, but I must hurry. I am in a terrible rush to get to my son in time. . . ."

"You harp on time. If it reassures you, I will stop time while we talk."

"Please don't, or I will have to do this all over again."

"Then I will *slow* time. For the sake of your righteousness and also your former beauty which I still behold perfected in my timeless eye. Come, be young! I count on you for relief. Lightness, a bit of lightness! My powers, tremendous, override all. My forces, my faces, my phases, they race and rage. Male toward female, mercy toward judgment, compassion toward law, wisdom toward—I forget exactly what. In short, Sarah, having imparted my effulgence, my aspects crash about, make runs to distant corners of my radiance like children darting to a base in hope of hearing a voice cry out, 'Allee, allee, home free!' The bark is chipping off the Tree of Life from constant glancing blows of my powerful, several, separate selves which you and your kind in creative covenant were to integrate with goodly acts. How well you've done this is attested to by endless tears and supplications on your side, and utter unpredictableness on mine."

"These are heavy matters, and I am . . ."

"Can't I make you see how it is? One phase pushes to the fore and smites with misfortune some good man walking in a field! To test, of all things, steadfastness! Another issues frightful orders to test viciousness among the virtuous! These matters vex me. I'd show more benign guidance to my human flock, yet suspect those free wills that I've given them run counter to my own! Sarah, much is darkening, I rely on you for lightness!"

Still mentally harping in her narrow, limited, human fashion on how time slipped away, Sarah could see all the same that this would be the worst of all times to forfeit her usefulness to God—terrible timing! She forced herself to alter tone and manner. Though her time-filled heart was thumping out its seconds full of fear for Isaac, she dismounted her donkey and leaned in simulated ease against a rock.

"What is your pleasure, God?"

Puffs of warm wind touched all parts of her body. She felt a voluptuousness take hold of her flesh—was God turning her into a young woman again, was time really nothing? Though the rock she leaned against was hard, she felt exceedingly comfortable.

"To begin with, a chat. Tiferet—Beauty—and Binah—Intelligence—must have risen. You needn't look impatient. How well fastened to your core are your own modes? Some years or days ago when I announced that you would

bear a son—let’s have no discussion about this now—you laughed. Yet, if I am not mistaken, you grew to love your son, Isaac.”

“With all my heart.”

“Yet your son Ishmael you also loved, did you not?”

“Of course I loved Ishmael! Did I not myself send Hagar, my servant, in to Abraham to conceive? I can still see the tent with its dark flares, its animal hangings, its low wide bed. Hagar, that Egyptian, danced toward the Patriarch, lured him there. . . .”

Sarah’s voice grew fainter, as if she spoke to herself, “Hagar and I held hands across the old man’s back. Abraham revived in the presence of youth. Why not I? Hagar’s son became my own! His strength and sleekness became my joy! Then when I no longer prayed or hoped or wished for it, God’s voice told me I would bear a child. God’s joke, I thought, to embarrass an old woman. Saying, ‘You will bear when I say to you: “Bear!”’ And did I not bear him on my knees?”

“Ishmael was the son of your knees and your bosom, Sarah, and very nearly of your loins. Yet you sent him out of your house with his mother to what might have been his death, for all you knew. Oh, I covered for you—I sent an angel with water before any real harm could be done. I promised Hagar that Ishmael would become the father of a nation of his own, and I kept my promise. But you, Sarah! How did you bring yourself to banish the first darling son of your heart?”

“Here I am,” said Sarah, hotly defending herself, “an old woman now, and was old even then! An old person’s love is cruel. Sees essentials, contracts to essence. Saves what must be saved. In my heart and body I was already a grandmother when I became a mother! Couldn’t you *see* that?”

“Calm yourself, poor old mother—or grandmother, as you choose to call yourself. Did I not cause all the springs to freshen and flow once more? Did I not make you young? And can I not do it again, this very moment, should I so desire?”

“It’s embarrassing,” Sarah said, hiding her eyes. “If one’s body is not one’s own. Against my will I bore Isaac. But when he leapt from my belly to my arms, I leapt like a lioness to protect him. Danger was everywhere. In Ishmael, my darling boy no longer. I said to Abraham, ‘Banish them!’ I stanchd his tears with my will and in place of Ishmael thrust my flesh!”

A puff of air sighed at Sarah’s ear. “Beneath all that beauty, so much cruelty! Well, you are my creation, made in my image. More accurately than the male of your species, with his unreliable appendage! Had I *that* to do again I would build a male regenerative organ as dependable as the female’s. Perhaps a retractable arrangement—you’ve seen the necks on my turtles?”

Sarah thought, While God rambles over Creation, what is happening to my son? Let me frame a shrewder answer and end this. “Yes, of course I know turtles. I also knew you would have plans for the slave-girl’s child. Hagar was far too comfortable where she was. A slave’s a slave, in the end. We gave her

all the freedom there was, yet the slave within was too great. She'd lost ambition, and would have stayed in her position forever. A push through the door was what she needed. To enter her real destiny, I mean. Like your demanding that Abraham set out into the world when you told him to go. Suppose he'd been too lazy, or too satisfied where he was? He'd be nothing now. So Hagar and Ishmael went out into the world and their names grew great. And I, too, must . . ."

"An ingenious answer in its way. Yet tell me, Sarah." The puffs of wind on her cheek grew hotter. "Did you never long for your first child? Did you not miss his daring outspokenness, his surprising, flashy exploits? Is it only Isaac's meekness that speaks to your mother's heart?"

Sarah yearned to get away, up to the mountaintop, where her beloved must certainly be seeking her! Yet she could not hold back questions of her own.

"And when you formed us from the clay, could you not have shaped us misfortune-free? Where is the womb's free will? Does it choose to disobey you when it cannot send forth fruit? You, Lord, can impregnate a stone, but I was created a woman who could not conceive. Can you not give up curiosity about your own creatures, to see what we will do when we face the worst of times? No water, no child, no land, no rest, no harvest, no friend, only enemies and slaughter—what will they do now? Can you not cease these tests, these researches in wretchedness?"

In the heat of speaking, Sarah at first sat upright, then rose to her feet. "Can you not bear to grant all your children the chance to prosper in this brief life," she said, moving purposefully in the direction of her donkey, "as any mother would?"

Sarah was stopped by the sound of what she thought was laughter.

"That *is* amusing. Women do not want that! They connive, and scheme, and choose one child over another, whom they cruelly deprive! I have seen it, and will see it again!"

At that, Sarah burst out: "It's you who make us choose! This child over that child! Time's cut too short, you have snatched away immortal life from us. We are forced to covet inheritance, how can it be shared? Humiliated by death, how can we not be cruel? You are bountiful, Lord, but there is never enough to go around."

Ominous silence. Sarah trembled. I have failed to amuse. I have lost, both time and Isaac!

"Take care, Sarah!" the voice rumbled in her ear. "I see that like Abraham you like to argue with your God. But I am not always in the mood."

"Forgive me if I spoke hastily. Although you have slowed time for me, my heart still runs up the mountain for my son's sake."

"Have I not managed to divert your purpose yet? Perhaps you'll reveal what provisions you have in your sack. Did you mean to find a shady tree and refresh yourself?"

"Your will be done, God," said Sarah. She pulled from her sack a male sheep that bleated in the light. "But let it truly be your will, and not some misreading by my husband's tired mind."

"What is your purpose here, Sarah? Surely you did not expect to slaughter and roast a sacrifice for me?"

At first Sarah was silent in protest against such teasing. But silence used up precious minutes. She answered, "This is why I must hurry to the mountaintop! To make sure my husband hears your command as you intend. Here is the sacrifice he must make to you. Not our son Isaac!"

"Are you so certain of my will, Sarah?"

"You who rescued a slave-girl's son will surely not demand the life of mine!"

An ominous pause, then the relief of God's words:

"Sarah, you have wit! The randiest of my creatures will butt his horn against your husband and stand in your son's stead. Well done, Sarah! This is a joke for all creation to savor. A ram from God!"

A puff of wind on Sarah's cheek, laughter in the distance, and soon, Sarah saw, the donkey had ceased its trembling. She mounted and they cantered on, Sarah spurring with her heels.

After a while she abandoned the donkey and went the rest of the way on foot, all the while reassuring herself. Isaac is young and Abraham old. If need be Isaac could topple that old man! But then she stumbled on thoughts hard as the stones of the mountain. Despair will rob Isaac of power. Make him submit to his father's force!

I raised a son to gentleness. Let it not kill him now.

She was late, too late! Isaac lay on the altar, his body bound with ropes, his face contorted in fear.

Sarah's cry of anguish so terrified the animal she carried that it smashed through the sack and charged into a thicket where it snared its horns, and was caught.

As was Abraham, mid-murder, the slaughterer's knife raised over his son.

Abraham's body was sweat-drenched, his knife-wielding fist shook with power. He could not change course. God had to send two angels to hang on his arm and drag it down.

"Abraham!" they cried, entering the episode at last. "Here is a ram for slaughter. No need to kill Isaac! Put an end to this shameful scene!"

Abraham looked wildly around for God, but saw only his wife clutching her breast. He scowled at her with all the fear and confusion in his own heart. Then with slow fingers he untied Isaac.

Sarah dragged herself from that place. Once she reached home, all the jagged stones she carried in her heart—the journey, the meeting with God, the sight of Isaac trussed on the altar like an animal for killing—crushed her with their weight. Sarah died, never to see Isaac again.

God lengthened the last of Sarah's earthly moments in hope of some final witticism to lighten his ever-darkening mood. Under the circumstances, the best Sarah could come up with was this:

"You made time slow for me, God, as I hurried toward Isaac's rescue. Now time rushes me toward rescue from all but You."

She heard laughter at her ear, felt embraced and lifted toward light. At the same moment, she knew that the God she talked and laughed with was no more than a merciful illusion God had laid across the darkness that separated them. She would reach beyond the illusion only when life had left her.

With her last breaths she uttered three piercing cries. Those who witnessed her death thought, "Sarah has flung her cries into the abyss of unknowing as Zipporah flung the foreskin of Moses' child at the pursuing God! Sarah's cries are as sharp as circumcision! They will be our inheritance, we will hear them whenever we hurl anguish or hope into the stony ear of the ram's horn."

Tekiah: "Whooooooooooooooooooooo!"

Shevarim: "Are-you; are-you; are-you; are-you!"

Teruah: "Are you-you-you-you-you-you-you!"

And what of the answers? Ah, they thought, answers come as coded as the cries! Sometimes warm and near, or from great, cold distances . . . faint . . . fainter. They thought of these things as they prepared for burial the body of the matriarch, Sarah. Who can tell, they wondered, whether silence is a degree of speech we have not yet learned to fathom?

ESTHER

Esther 7:2-8

On the second day, the king again asked Esther at the wine feast, "What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to half the kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." Queen Esther replied: "If Your Majesty will do me the favor, and if it pleases Your Majesty, let my life be granted me as my wish, and my people as my request. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, massacred, and exterminated. Had we only been sold as bondmen and bondwomen, I would have kept silent; for the adversary is not worthy of the king's trouble."

Thereupon King Ahasuerus demanded of Queen Esther. "Who is he and where is he who dared to do this?" "The adversary and enemy," replied Esther, "is this evil Haman!" And Haman cringed in terror before the king and the queen. The king, in his fury, left the wine feast for the palace garden, while Haman remained to plead with Queen Esther for his life; for he saw that the king had resolved to destroy him. When the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet room, Haman was lying prostrate on the couch on which Esther reclined. "Does he mean," cried the king, "to ravish the queen in my own palace?"

Commentary

Esther makes us confront what we think when we think about the nature of biblical heroes. Do we prefer them to be entirely virtuous? Or do we feel more inspired by an ordinary human mixture of qualities that these heroes, wrestling and suffering, take in hand in service to a desired goal? When they achieve the goal, they do so by striving against their own lesser qualities.

Clearly the Bible prefers the second way. Of its heroes and heroines, none is without flaw. Think of preening Joseph, duplicitous Jacob, lascivious David, irascible Moses; cruel Sarah, manipulative Rebekah, thieving Rachel—all of those who grow despite, or dragging, their flaws toward greatness.

Esther is of their company. She makes no protest against the lulling, dulling attentions she receives as she prepares to become winner of the harem beauty contest (for months, rubbed with lotions, soaked in perfumes). She may, in short, have in her at the beginning a good deal of empty-headed narcissist, of silly girl who thinks of nothing but her skin. Yet once chosen queen, she is able, at risk of death, to throw her whole being into combat against the forces of evil. She resembles some of our contemporaries, so disquieting to preconceptions of what thinking, valorous women ought to look like: the ones who insist on dyeing, teasing, and spray-fixing their hair, who wear sexy clothes, stiletto heels, grow inch-long fingernails lacquered red; and just when they've convinced you they haven't a bean worth saving in their brains, send themselves through law school, medical school, Ph.D. programs, and come out fighting for righteous causes, still wearing 3-inch heels.

I have never met a woman who liked the Megillah of Esther. Too many aspects of the story make us squirm.

First, what to do with Vashti? She seems a heroine of defiance, but the text doesn't recognize her. It's the genius of the midrashic rabbis that adds the essential note missing from Vashti's part of the story. When the King sent for her to appear before his carousing guests, says a midrash in *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, she was to come naked.

Every Purim I have to check the text to remind myself that this searing detail is not in the Bible story. But the midrashic version, once imagined, will not go away. It has seized the text, and made itself a legitimate part of it.

The rabbis did not say that Vashti was a hero, but they heightened our sense of what was at stake for her. She was not arrogant and willful, she was self-respecting and full of courage. She upholds the sacredness of human, therefore divine, aspect in a court so debauched that any woman who enters will certainly be dehumanized.

Into this milieu Mordecai thrusts his niece, Esther. Mordecai doesn't yet have the excuse that the Jews are threatened. Haman has still not spoken. But just in case the time comes. And when it does, Esther turns herself into a great and heroic strategist—albeit of the bedroom.

With uneasiness we see that the text praises Esther but is silent on Vashti, and silent on the part Mordecai plays when he volunteers Esther for the King's harem.

Esther is a Purim-shpiel, a play, and all of our Purim celebrations are playful. Yet beneath the surface of the story are underlying layers of story to which we also respond. The thrusting of Esther into whoredom by her uncle can't be entirely dismissed as cartoon, considering the history of women in the world. And the threat of annihilation of the Jews is too present in our history, recent and ancient, for us to regard the Megillah as entirely playful.

Then there is the killing orgy at the end.

The great massacre of Haman's family and the Shushan populace (all of whom are anti-Semites) is folk hyperbole, a release of frustration and wish fulfillment at Jewish powerlessness. But the Purim massacre of Palestinian worshipers at a mosque in Hebron some years ago by a literalist of *Megillat Esther* conflates reality and dream, folklore and fact, harmless wish-fulfilling fantasy and hideous deed. Yet even before we ever heard of that massacre, we felt in the story of Esther a built-in unease, an instability as the reader, or hearer, registers these undercurrents.

When Vashti's incredibly risky refusal of the King makes way for Esther's obsequiousness, we understand that Vashti is haughty in the service of self-respect and the dignity of personhood, made in God's image; Esther is self-sacrificing in the most self-demeaning way in the service of the Jewish people.

Megillat Ester chooses Esther's way over Vashti's, but surely we'd like to acknowledge the importance of both.

In my own midrashic continuation of the story, "After Esther," I try to.

After Esther

Haman and his sons are dead, hurrah! The Jews are under the protection of King Ahasuerus, who encouraged them to punish the anti-Semites of Shushan. Now people respect the Jews because of their surprising blows. And all this is the work of beautiful and clever Esther, whom the King desired— thank God!— and made his wife!

Now Esther, who saved the Jewish people from annihilation, is left to live out her life with King Ahasuerus. For a while the afterglow of glory gave a lovely light, but then it faded. Esther's husband raised up the Jews, but he's the same Ahasuerus, devoted to drunken revelries, and a sloppy drunk himself much of the time. Whenever Esther sleeps she dreams escape dreams.

One night the inevitable happens. Ahasuerus throws a lavish, wine-soaked saturnalia for powerful neighboring potentates. Some rule kingdoms wealthier than his. Some boast more renowned magicians. Some brag of the extraordinary beauty of their women. In that category, King Ahasuerus feels no disadvantage. His queen, he says, can be compared to the finest woman on earth.

“Prove it,” yell the swaying, sousing, lolling, vomiting potentates.

At that moment, Esther is dreaming one of her escape dreams. It is set in another time and land whose language is incomprehensible to her, as if she’s being prepared for other lives.

This other Esther steps onto a brilliantly lit stage wearing red spike heels and a white bathing suit with a no-string bra and a G-string bikini bottom.

“What’s holding things up?” leers a man with a tape measure.

This Esther tells him to watch where he lays his tape.

He yells out the numbers: “38-22-38! She’s a perfect contender!” He gives her a friendly nudge on the thigh and asks for her hobby.

This Esther says she has no hobby.

“Sing with a guitar, dance on your toes, strum a little on a harp?” She could sing ‘Mary Had a Little Lamb,’ for God’s sake, couldn’t she?

Esther has never tried. She is usually quiet, by herself, an orphan, she explains. The reason she entered a beauty contest was to be of help to her people.

“That’s the ticket! You tell ‘em! They love to hear that stuff!”

He’s right. There isn’t a dry eye in the house when Esther is crowned. The tapeman himself sets the crown on her head. As his hands come down he brushes them against her, top and bottom. Then he’s on to the runner-up. Esther sees her fight to keep her smile as he rummages among the trophies on a table with one hand and rummages behind the runner-up’s back with the other.

This Esther removes her shoe and, with her heel, spikes his hand to the table. “I thought of a hobby,” she says. “Tabletop ornaments.”

By the time Esther wakes from the dream the King sends six eunuchs to tell Esther to anoint and perfume herself for three days and then appear before the visiting potentates—naked! The eunuchs laugh: “Esther’s royal share/now laid bare!”

Esther fasts and prays and scours her clever brain for a plan, a strategy. She runs to the window to look into the courtyard, hoping Mordecai will be there, but he’s gone. He moved with his wife and children to the suburbs now that the anti-Semites are letting in the Jews.

Toward dawn of the first night she falls asleep and dreams again. Isn’t this strange, she thinks in the dream. Here I am a queen and have everything, why am I weeping?

In fact this dream is the strangest of all. She sees a crowd of people celebrating, dressed in costumes to resemble herself, Vashti, and Mordecai. From this throng of Esthers and Vashtis and Mordecais emerge three people who really are Esther and Vashti and Mordecai, and they begin to speak.

Vashti wears a shift on which is printed *Jews for Vashti*. She says, “There is a Vashti faction, you know. They regard me as the heroine of the story, not you.”

“I always thought you were brave,” answers Esther.

"I deliberately usurped myself. When I refused to submit to the King I made room for you to be chosen," says Vashti.

"The Kingdom was filled with beautiful virgins!" Esther says. "How did it happen that the King chose me?"

"Indeed, the Persians scorn Jewish women. Beauty spoiled by suffering, they say. I was the one who accustomed the King to such beauty. In Esther he recognized Vashti and looked for me in your arms!"

"Then you, Vashti—are you . . . ?"

"Let it be enough to say that I created the taste in Ahasuerus for the sad-eyed look of suffering Jewish beauty. He couldn't get enough of it, as good as bound feet to a Mandarin."

"But poor Vashti, you were banished!"

"I was the spy who did not come in from the cold."

"And poor Esther has come in from the cold, but to the heat of Hell."

"When they rubbed your body with oils and perfumes for a year you were content! Rubbed, massaged, perfumed, painted with colors, to win the King's notice. Ah, life in the seraglio! Lying on cushions, feeding on sweets. Soft airs, warm vapors, lulling songs, sleep, dreams. Admit it—you were delighted with those comforts and attentions!"

"The mind is meant to rot there!" Esther weeps. "In the night, terror and disgust. Submitting to the wine-soaked flesh of my husband. Sinking into nothingness, a kind of madness! Then Mordecai came to me. 'Don't think, Esther, because you're a queen, that you can escape the common-fate,' he said. From that moment my brain burned in its shell. Like a general I maneuvered the two men! Lulled Haman, positioned Ahasuerus, then planted poison seeds of fear in Haman until he threw himself on my mercy while the king read in Haman's outstretched limbs not fear but lust! Action was my freedom! I never foresaw prison."

Then Mordecai, wearing the sackcloth and ashes of permanent mourning, joins in.

"Stop! It's indecent for you both to mourn your own tiny fate. If it's clearly for the good of the people, can't a Jewish girl be sacrificed without such hullabaloo? Didn't Abraham agree to sacrifice Isaac? The boy lay there, trussed, until an angel freed him. My girl wiggled free of her bonds and saved the Jewish people! Should I be blamed for that? These quibbles eat away at heroism. And then the bloodbath at the end. Yes, I'll call it by its true name. Massacre. The Jews, unarmed, were to have been slaughtered. Once armed, they did the slaughtering. Does that surprise anyone? I get bags of hate mail, imagine, over such a story! For once, Jews come out winners, and nobody can stand it."

A note flies in attached to a brick, just missing Mordecai's head. He picks it up, and reads.

"Another humanitarian who threatens to kill me because I condone killing!" He shouts, "It offends you? Believe me, it doesn't offend me. Were you upset by the Nazi hangings at Nuremberg? Not me! I regretted every one who

took his own life—Hitler, Goebbels, Goering—cheating the hangman. Mussolini upside down by the feet in the public square—that was a moment!

“But Haman’s sons,’ people say, ‘how does it look?’ Couldn’t they be spared? In that case, I say, Get them to hand over *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion!* Their pamphlets on how Jews run the media and control banking, their Ku Klux Klan hoods, their swastika armbands, their true-eyewitness accounts of the murder of children whose blood is baked in the matzoh, their cache of arms and crosses for burning, their Wannsee agreement, their final solution—all of it! Then I’ll think it over.”

Dream-Esther astonishes the Esther who is dreaming by what she now cries out: “Storytellers say it never happened, that I never had sex with the King. That God in His mercy intervened, caused the necessary organ to wither at the moment of penetration, or so pickled it in brine that with it at one end, and the King’s pickled brain at the other, they failed between them to capture the place of entry. Night after night. Forever, they say. Some people want to believe that. But if they thought about it, they would realize the truth. How much can we call on God to do in one miracle? And if great, widespread tragedy is averted, isn’t it too petty, too ungrateful, to ask, ‘And now what about my personal happiness?’ That’s how it is with us. We move from cataclysm to cataclysm. History rewards us with tableaux. Haman is forever plotting, Mordecai and Esther are forever racking their brains for a way out, the Jews are forever oppressed, then they are triumphant. I stand forever looking out of the palace window with longing in my heart.”

As soon as she wakes on the second day, Esther knows what to do. She sends a swift message to the Jews of Shushan, who are now prosperous and safe because of her.

“Ransom me,” her note says. “Offer any sum to the King for my release. He’ll be glad to be rid of me—there’s a limit to how much suffering Jewish beauty he can take. Let me live in quiet peace among my people. Remember that my silence and submission have been for your sake.”

But the elders of the community, who now feel extremely safe, say, “How women love to catastrophize! She’s the queen. Let her make use of her own wealth to ransom herself!”

Among the beggar throngs outside the palace gates are spies and augurs, all of them watchful. News of this new scandal-in-the-making at court soon spreads among the tattered multitude and reaches the ears of Vashti, who survives among them on palace scraps.

As soon as Vashti hears the whispers, she slides into the palace along secret passageways known to her. In rags, her hair a wilderness, with all the signs of decay—scabrous skin and toothless gums—upon her, she makes her way to Esther’s chamber. There she finds the queen collapsed in terror, under the contemptuous eyes of the six eunuchs, whose gelded bodies are clothed with rich garments.

"Did you think," Vashti says, "because you were Queen, that you could escape the fate of women? It may even be that you were put here for this purpose—to take your stand against our destroyers!"

"But if I refuse," Esther answers, "I will be destroyed like you!"

The six eunuchs jeer together in their terrible doggerel: "Vashti, Vashti,/ balked because she/had pride!/Now Death's at her side!"

And they hold their noses because Vashti's dignity led directly to her poverty and smells bad. The eunuchs throw her out.

"Help me, God," Esther prays. "Free my wits to improvise a plan, or send Mordecai to advise me, or let the King think of the Chronicles again, and for the sake of past favors, rescind his decree against me now."

But not one of these things happens. History, like literature, doesn't like to wade in the same solution twice.

That night the six grinning eunuchs carry out the command of King Ahasuerus to bring Esther forth naked. "Esther, Esther," they maliciously recite, "this'll test 'er!"

Esther removes her rich garments one by one. When she is naked, barefoot and crownless, she walks silently along the palace corridors flanked by the eunuchs.

As they approach the hall where the king carouses with his guests, she hears rough shouts, bursts of laughter, and now and then the stifled scream of a woman.

But I am Queen! Then Esther thinks of the women in her dream who put on silver paper crowns and called themselves Queen Esther. She looks down at her bare feet and knows her power is spent.

On the hip of a guard hangs a jeweled dagger. Esther snatches it and plunges it into her chest. Soon her own blood clothes her naked body in a royal garment of red, and under this covering the eunuchs carry beautiful Esther into the King's presence.

Some say he was remorseful, shoved his weeping face into an armpit while his huge belly shook with grief; some say enraged—he threw wine goblets and food at the eunuchs; some say delighted to have won his bet and rid himself of his tiresome wife at the same time. He clapped his hands, struggled to his feet and skipped elephantiacally around the room, like the hippo toe-dancing in Disney's *Fantasia*.

When Mordecai heard the news he put on sackcloth and ashes again. He always kept them handy—what a pessimist!

"Oh, Esther," he grieved. "Just a few more years of suffering and you might have become a *tzadeket*! Now that can't happen, and the Jews no longer have a friend at court. Any day the evil decree against us may be revived."

And so it came to pass. Again and again. For Queen Esther was dead. No one had thought it necessary to protect the protectress, or to grant the Jewish woman whom we call Queen her freedom.

Saints and Fanatics: The Problematic Connection Between Religion and Spirituality

WILLIAM NICHOLLS

1. Religion Produces Both Saints and Fanatics

IN MY RESEARCH ON THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN ANTI-Semitism, I came across some who seem to have been both. The best known example is St. John Chrysostom, the great preacher of Byzantine Christianity, who was called the “golden mouth” for his eloquent sermons. Yet in the same sermons, so much praised up to the present day for their spirituality, he called the Jews *deicides*, killers of God, blaming them for all sorts of imaginary crimes, and describing their synagogues as whorehouses. In the mediaeval period, Franciscan saints who wrote eloquently about Christian love led the assault on the Jews, claiming that they were responsible for the ritual murder of Christian children, a charge now acknowledged by all responsible scholars to be a libel totally without foundation. Yet many Jews lost their lives as a result of the zeal of these saints. Martin Luther, so much admired by Protestant Christians, was also a fanatical anti-Semite, in his old age at least, calling for measures against Jews that it took the Nazis to carry out. What kind of sanctity is it that can lead to hatred of Jews?

In Islam, Hamas provides abundant social services and charitable enterprises, while training suicide bombers to kill Israeli children and other civilians. Its charter defines its absolute hostility to Jews as such, not just Israelis or Zionists. They are all eligible to be killed.

In Judaism, along with many saintly rabbis, we find the brilliant Torah student Yigal Amir plotting and carrying out the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, the democratically elected Prime Minister of his country. At his trial he continued to maintain that he did what he did for God and the Jewish people. In his case, as in many others, fanaticism seemed to consist in the complete identification of a political viewpoint with the divine will. These phenomena of the three so-called western religions can be paralleled, at least to some extent, in the religions of Asia. Look, for example, at the communal strife between Hindus and Muslims in the Indian subcontinent. Even the non-violent Buddhists do not seem to be entirely exempt from the phenomenon of religious hatred.

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Violence in the name of religion is not the only form of fanaticism. It shades off through many gradations into various forms of bigotry and prejudice that are no less incompatible with religious ethics, even if less serious in their consequences for others. Today, the issue of abortion brings out the fanaticism in both sides. And the intense partisanship of contemporary sexual politics, though often—but not always—unconnected with religion, seems to involve a degree of passion that it is easy to call fanatical. An analysis of fanaticism ought to throw light on these phenomena too.

How can we account for this double effect of religious training, sometimes operating within the same individual? It appears as if the same cause can produce both love and hate. For many this does not seem to be a problem. Either they concentrate on the fanatics, condemning all religion out of hand. Or they look only at the saints, and the decent people among the ordinary adherents of the religion, dismissing the fanatics as an inconsequential anomaly. The problem arises when we take both saints and fanatics seriously, on the reasonable assumption that both are in some way products of religion. In the most extreme case, we find those who appear to be both saints and fanatics at once. How can we explain that? What are its implications for understanding the nature of religion?

It seems at least that the widespread idea that religion and spirituality are distinguishable, even distinct, has abundant justification. Everyone will agree that a central purpose of religion should be to encourage the development of spiritual people, capable of disinterested and indiscriminating love. All too often religion does not do this. It can even engender hatred for others. On the other hand, spirituality is manifestly to be found among adherents of all religions, not just “our own,” and even among those of no religion at all. What then are these two entities, religion and spirituality, and how are they to be distinguished from each other?

At the common sense, or intuitive, level, there seems to be little difficulty in understanding these distinctions. However, once we begin to consider religion and spirituality systematically, we run into formidable problems of definition, involving both terms, spirituality and religion.

Perhaps I can begin by saying that spirituality involves transcendence of the ego. It is the capacity to recognize in the Other someone with claims upon me potentially equal to the claims of my own well-being or even survival. It may go beyond that to recognition or awareness of someone or something transcending the universe as a whole, whose claim is not relative but absolute, and in whom human love and human law find their foundation, origin, and eternal justification. And it also seems that such awareness is inseparable from awareness of a spiritual dimension within oneself, called by various names in various traditions. I wish to refer to this dimension as the Self beyond the ego.¹ Not to be spiritual is perhaps to be unaware of, insensible to, these dimensions of human experience, just as to be unmusical means to be incapable of appreciating the language or the beauty of music.

The problem of the definition of religion has never to my knowledge been fully and satisfactorily resolved. Obviously, it is not too difficult to give a descriptive definition that will enable us to recognize a religion when we come across one—though even that is more difficult than might be supposed, in view of the real possibility that there are secular religions, such as Communism and Nazism, and even perhaps “secular humanism.” These movements do not recognize any divinity or transcendent dimension, but do exhibit other characteristics of a religion, including the capacity to call forth self-sacrificing devotion from their adherents. A definition of religion that excludes them risks excluding Buddhism at the same time. Yet Buddhism is very generally considered to be a religion, and certainly it encourages spirituality among its followers. It is far more difficult to find a definition that is also explanatory, that suggests to us what is really distinctive about religion, and (most important of all) how it works.

Again, we can make a beginning by saying that a religion is a social and cultural structure—or construct, in the language now fashionable—embodying a myth that accounts for humanity’s place in the cosmos, telling the believers who they are, what their duties are, and what their destiny is. The myth is embodied in symbolic practices or rituals that renew its power through time. Religions normally define a special or sacred sphere, in contrast to which the remainder of life is defined as profane. Generally, they also usually define a special class of sacred persons, responsible for the teaching of the myth and the performance of the ritual. With very few exceptions—again, Buddhism comes to mind—these societies believe that their laws are divinely given.

Religion in this sense is found in all traditional or pre-modern societies. But seldom is this dimension of social life recognized by such societies as what we are used to calling “religion.” Rather, in traditional societies religion embraces the whole of life. Its laws refer to all aspects of living, not just to personal ethics or ritual. In other words, for such societies *all* law is of divine origin. While there is a distinction to be made and observed between the sacred and the profane, there is no such distinction between the religious and the secular dimensions, because the secular sphere is not recognized at all and by the same token, religion is also not recognized as a separate domain.

In fact, religion in the familiar sense is a concept that originated within Christianity, for particular historical reasons, and was only subsequently applied to other “religions.” This greatly complicates our problem of definition, since the concept is unknown to the vast majority of the social systems to which we ourselves wish to apply it. Religion as we usually think of it is a greatly diminished force by comparison with what it was and still is in more traditional societies.

In recent years, the academic study of religion has introduced new insights that traditional thought did not need to address. Today, we are compelled to recognize that all religions considered as social institutions exhibit common characteristics and forms of social behavior on the part of their adherents, despite their many differences on ultimate questions. Even if we believe that our own religion rests on divine revelation, we cannot blind

ourselves to what it has in common at the human level with other religions. This important fact has implications for this inquiry.

One fact stands out at once. Religion is indeed a *human* phenomenon, perhaps in several senses. As G. K. Chesterton remarked in a similar context, “elephants do not put up statues to famous elephants.” If we take an evolutionary view, clearly religion is a product of a late and advanced stage in evolution. Judging by the archaeological evidence, it seems to have emerged not too long after the appearance of speech, the capacity which above all seems to distinguish humans from their animal ancestors. Is religion perhaps characteristic of humanity as a species? In that case, western secularity might be an anomaly, even an aberration, not destined to endure. Many enlightened people used to think that it was religion that was the anomaly, that its days were numbered. Empirically, that now seems a lot less likely than it once did.

Is religion also human in another sense, human rather than divine in origin? In Christian thought, the term “revealed religion” is well known. We also hear of “true religion.” But if there is revealed religion, it seems that there are also *non-revealed* religions, and that they too are capable of engendering spirituality. This observation suggests that even revealed religion might not be so exclusively “revealed,” that there may be elements in any empirical religion, even a “true” one, that are human constructs, responding to human social and psychological needs. It is unlikely that there is such a thing as pure religion, if we mean by this a religion in every respect divinely revealed.

2. Fundamentalism and Fanaticism

What then do we mean by fanaticism? Is it the same as fundamentalism, a term now very widely but perhaps too loosely employed to designate people who adhere tenaciously to a traditional form of religion, while rejecting or even reacting against modernity?²

Properly speaking, fundamentalism referred originally to an early twentieth century movement in American Protestant Christianity that stressed adherence to a number of “fundamentals” of Evangelical religion, including the literal inspiration of the Christian bible. But biblical literalism was not the only or even perhaps the most important of the fundamentals. More central still was the doctrine of the substitutionary death of Christ for all sinners. So-called “biblical fundamentalism” was important primarily because it safeguarded that essential element of Evangelical faith from liberal modification, prevalent then and since.

More recently the term has been applied to *haredim* or ultra-Orthodox Jews, and to Islamists, with a connotation of fanaticism in both cases. The term is not of much help in identifying particular groups of Muslims, because all Muslims believe in the verbal inerrancy of the revelation to Muhammad. What is really meant is the advocacy of a particular, very strict interpretation of the Shari‘a, or Muslim law code, and the hope and intention of applying it in an Islamic state.

As for the Jewish *haredim*, who have considerable differences among themselves, the term, fundamentalist, is inappropriate for more than one reason: traditional Jews are allowed a great deal of flexibility in biblical interpretation, in spite of their common belief in the divine revelation through Moses; and in any case (as with Islamists) it is not biblical interpretation but a legal code that is at issue. Indeed, perhaps one should go further and say that it is not even that, since all Orthodox Jews believe in the *halacha*. Rather, the *haredim* differ from Zionists on the religious status of Israel. They do not share the common view of religious Zionists that the State of Israel is the first sprouting of redemption. At worst, Zionism is for them a blasphemous preemption of the work of the Messiah. Yet most people would call the Lubavitcher hasidim ultra-Orthodox or *haredi*, and they do seem to attach positive religious significance to the State of Israel.

Probably therefore the only thing such Jews have in common with one another that they do not have in common with all traditional Jews is a certain life-style and way of dressing, arising from an attachment to the society of East European Jewry before the Holocaust. Or perhaps the *haredim* do have something important in common with the devout of other religions, some of whom may indeed be fundamentalists. They share with them a strategy for dealing with the anomalous situation of modernity, as they perceive it to be. Religion, they feel, cannot be confined to a particular area of life. It must govern all life. Yet much of life today seems to them irremediably profane. They are therefore compelled to narrow their own way of life so that it can fit in to the confines of religion. Such a strategy would have been unnecessary in a genuinely traditional society, where religion was not yet a separated domain, and involves a degree of false consciousness.

It is certainly far from clear that *haredi* Jews have anything distinctive in common with Islamists. While some at least of the latter believe in the use of terrorism including suicide bombing to attain their theo-political ends, there is no sign that this is the case with ultra-Orthodox Jews. At most, they have been guilty of relatively minor forms of violence in defense of Sabbath observance.

The media, however, often apply the term fundamentalist to Jews who are not *haredi* at all, but modern Orthodox (as they would be called in North America) or “national religious” as they would more commonly be termed in Israel. Among this group, terrorism has very occasionally surfaced—and this is also the group to which the political assassin Yigal Amir belongs. But it would be difficult to argue that this group is in any sense fundamentalist, and indeed their positive view of the place of the State of Israel in redemptive history, stemming ultimately from the teaching of Rav A. Y. Kook, is an innovation from the point of view of older tradition. They join this essentially religious view of politics with the Revisionist Zionism of which Vladimir Jabotinsky was the inspiration, as he was of the resistance groups to British rule over the country in the last days of the Mandate. These groups did employ means that have been frequently described as terrorist, though it is doubtful if the term can be properly applied to measures applied exclusively against military targets.

We may be justified in calling fanatics those who are willing to use terrorism or assassination to gain their ends, religious or political or both. Here we are getting a little closer to the distinction we are looking for. Those who are willing to use such means consider the religious-political goals of their own group to override the commonly acknowledged commandment forbidding murder or suicide.

In the same way, many devout mediaeval Christians seem to have believed that killing Jews was justified because of their supposed crimes, and therefore did not constitute murder. In the middle ages, the Christian masses, led by some of the inferior clergy and members of religious orders, seem to have become corporately fanatical. Similarly, many German Christians seem to have experienced little difficulty in joining in the Nazi program of exterminating Jews, or at least in giving it their tacit support.³ There is nothing in any form of Christian fundamentalism to justify this step beyond the border of normal morality. In fact, the Nazi "brown church" was if anything on the liberal side of the divide, whereas some of the rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust could be called fundamentalists.

Fanaticism, then, may perhaps be the characteristic of those who regard their religious or religio-political ends as justifying the use of means that would otherwise be forbidden. These means, slander, murder, and murder by suicide, are employed against other groups defined by the leaders of the fanatical group as enemies. On an emotional level, it seems that the fervor of their attachment to their religious object, deity or otherwise, leads them to hate correspondingly those identified as opponents of their own truth. Underlying fanaticism, therefore, is hate. Since hate is contrary to spirituality, the paradox we began with arises just there in its sharpest form. Yet the fanatics would be likely to reply that religion does teach us to hate evil, and the enemies of their religion are the embodiment of evil, and therefore it is justified to hate them.

3. Idolatry and Spirituality

That all religions teach spirituality is beyond doubt. But the lesson is not always learned. Perhaps even the majority of their adherents do not learn the lesson to any advanced level, but remain much the sort of people they would have been if they had not belonged to a religion. This is especially to be expected in more traditional societies, where pretty well everyone belongs to the religion. Today and in the West, when membership in any religion is a fairly conscious choice, not much reinforced by society, this is less likely to be true. Conformity is perhaps the least of the reasons that lead people to be religious in our own society.

What other reasons could we find for adherence to a religion today, other than the simple wish to find an expression and a social reinforcement for one's innate spirituality? Some feel the need for structure in their lives, "something to hold on to," as people often say. Some obsessive and compulsive personality types may be attracted by the ritualistic side of religion. No religion can exist without ritual, but some find the main attraction of religion in its ritual, and

regard its precise observance as more important than anything else, including those ends to which ritual is normally considered to be a means.

Others may be in a state of inner conflict. For reasons of guilt, they are very strict in their observance, even ascetical and self-punishing. But at the same time this demand for “instinctual renunciation” creates unconscious anger and rebellion, which cannot be directed at the religious authority. Hence it is displaced outward, on to those outside the religion, members of other religions, or today, on to secularists. I have suggested elsewhere that this mechanism can lead to paranoid hostility against members of other religions, as in the case of anti-Semitism among mediaeval monks and other clergy.⁴ Thus, there may be an underground connection between religious asceticism and hate for outsiders.

It seems to me that the answer to our question has to be sought primarily along psychological lines, rather than social ones. An examination of the social function of religion will not shed much light on our question. We are dealing with individual personality factors that determine how a person will respond to the total environment of religion. I would speculate that the healthier the person psychologically, the more likely they are to employ their religion as an expression and reinforcement of their own innate spirituality. Even saints are not always psychologically healthy, and their ardent devotion can mask severe unconscious problems. I see spirituality therefore as something belonging to normal people, if by normal we mean (as medical psychiatry so often does not) optimally healthy. Religious hatred belongs to pathology, the pathology of the individual and the pathology of religion.

Classically, the Western religions have attempted to distinguish between spiritual worship and idolatry. This is of course a normative distinction, first made within the Jewish tradition in its early form in ancient Israel, and continued by later Judaism, by Christianity, and by Islam. However, the fact that it is normative should not exclude it from consideration even in a phenomenological inquiry, since there have been numerous attempts to analyze idolatry and discover what it essentially is, and how it differs from spiritual worship of the true God.⁵

In the Ten Commandments, and elsewhere in the Torah and the Prophets, the issue is not defined as monotheism, but as fidelity. God has made a covenant with Israel, in which he will be their God and they will be his people. Fidelity to the covenant requires that they do not worship any other gods. Like a husband, God is jealous of Israel's relations with other gods, and he will be no *mari complaisant*. Historians differ on whether when the Torah was given Israel fully recognized that the God of the covenant was also the only possible God. Some say that they still recognized other gods as real, while acknowledging that Israel was forbidden to worship them. But even if Moses was not a full monotheist (and I am pretty sure he was) the issue was soon joined.

As Israel entered Canaan, there was a serious risk of religious assimilation. Inter-marriage with the Canaanites, all the easier because they spoke the same language, could and did lead to the adoption of Canaanite religious

practices by Israelite people. Archaeology confirms what the prophets of Israel tell us, that polytheistic religious practices were common in the areas settled by the Israelites. In the struggle against the religious practices of their neighbors, if not earlier, the prophets of Israel won through to clear realization that the gods their neighbors worshipped were no gods. On the one hand, they were powerless; on the other, their supposed demands were cruel and immoral, demeaning to human beings.

It is a curious fact, whose significance is still disputed, that the prophetic denunciations of idolatry miss its real nature.⁶ Such prophets as Isaiah ridicule the idolaters on the assumption that they really believe that the man-made images that focus their devotion are actually divinities. It appears that this is not what idolaters believe. Rather, they believe that the divinity inhabits the image in the context of worship, but is not identical with it. Idols can be consecrated and also deconsecrated. Similar views are held by Hindus, and in a more subtle but analogous sense by traditional Christians, Catholic and Eastern Orthodox, who make use of images in worship.

Nevertheless, the prophetic denunciation did turn on something of critical importance. The God worshipped by Israel was unique in the ancient world in being *essentially* invisible. He could not—not just must not—be represented by any sculptured or painted image, because he had no physical form. The sanctuary of the Temple contained no image. When Pompey, on conquering Jerusalem, entered the Holy of Holies, he was astonished to find it empty. Even the Ark of the Covenant containing the original two tablets of the Law was no longer there, having been lost, or permanently hidden, centuries before.

If God is essentially invisible, known only through his messages in speech given through his prophets, he cannot be identified with anything in the world. Indeed, this seems to be part of what was meant by the term *kadosh*, holy, so widely ascribed to him in the Bible and in liturgical tradition. The perhaps even more important term, *one*, has also been given a radical sense by Maimonides in particular. God's unique simplicity means that he cannot be described by any term borrowed from the created universe. It is even highly questionable if anything at all is a proper symbol of his unique nature.

Today, many scholars suppose—though not it seems on very solid evidence—that early Israelite religion was part of a widespread cultural shift from matriarchy to patriarchy. In fact, Israel's struggle was by no means only against the mother goddesses. The fathers were no less to be repudiated. Israel found the whole myth of a divine family, so widespread in the ancient Near East, essentially idolatrous. Thus, a most important, even basic, distinction between YHWH and the gods of Israel's neighbors was that he had no consort. Other gods had consorts. Popular Israelite religion in pre-exilic days probably gave the God of Israel a consort too, his *Asherah*, but this too was vehemently denounced by the priests and prophets, the guardians of "revealed religion." If God does not have a consort, he does not belong at all to the divine family that is to be found all over the religions of the ancient Near East. If he is not

mother, neither in the last resort is he father, in the quasi-biological sense in which the mother goddesses are mother. In contrast to the gods of Israel's neighbors, the God of Israel was beyond sex and gender, even though the masculine pronoun was conventionally used of him.

If it had been the case that the God of Israel was to be regarded as father in the same sense that the goddesses were mothers, the shift would only have been from one form of idolatry to another. But this shift was not from one idolatry to another, but from idolatry to transcendence. The struggle of Israel against the mother goddesses, today widely thought of as a victory of patriarchy over matriarchy, was in essence something far more profound, even if not all its implications were apparent at the time. It was a struggle to implant in human beings the concept of a divinity altogether transcending such forces in the unconscious and in the cosmos as fatherhood and motherhood, the natural objects of worship for most people.

This God then is not a cosmic force, like the storm god Baal of Canaan, or the ubiquitous mother goddesses, who represent sex and fertility in human beings, animals, and the cosmos. Although the God of Israel could be called father and king (though not mother or queen) this was a concession to human speech. What was meant was something beyond either image, masculine or feminine. Because he ruled over the universe, he was king; because he took care of human beings, he was father. But he was not properly to be thought of as masculine in a sense that is the polar opposite of feminine. The feminist criticism of patriarchy undoubtedly bears on the empirical religion of the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions, but it does not touch their spiritual essence. The apparent masculinity of the biblical God is not opposed to femininity—indeed there is plenty of feminine language used of God—but concretely to the mother goddesses of the pagan world, and the sacralization of sex that accompanied their worship. It is relevant to our subject that sacralized sexuality can, even today, be a form of fanaticism.

Thus, not only mother but sex itself was desacralized by ancient Israel. Instead, sex was to be sanctified, not denied. Laws were provided to restrict the expression of sexuality to those outside the birth family. Incest was forbidden in any form. Sexual expression was restricted to those of the opposite sex, forbidding homosexuality, and to those united in marriage, forbidding adultery. Even within marriage, sexual intercourse was to be confined to certain times. But, in contrast to Christianity, sex was also encouraged where permitted. It was both a duty for the sake of procreation, and something to be fully enjoyed with gratitude to the one who had created it for enjoyment as well as for procreation.

All these provisions were in considerable contrast to the view of sexuality in the surrounding culture. There, sex was a cosmic force to be worshipped, often with orgiastic rites, or, on the contrary, sometimes by self-castration, actual or symbolic. The main regulator of its social expression was usually the economics of family alliances. In particular, homosexuality seems to have been widely tolerated or even in some contexts encouraged, in virtually all ancient

societies but that of Israel. Israel's banning of homosexuality, today found scandalous by all liberals, is also clearly related to its repudiation of the worship of cosmic and unconscious forces, known to its prophets as idols. It is not just abusive language when homosexual behavior is called an abomination in the Torah. This is precisely the term used for idols.

Comprehensively, then, idolatry seems to mean the worship of, or holding allegiance to, anything less than the transcendent God. Worship of deified parents (of either sex) is idolatry, worship of sex and power is idolatry, worship of one's own people and nation will likewise be idolatry. We may go a little further and say that from the point of view of biblical religion idolatry is the worship of anything less than the human Self, that one legitimate image of the divine, implanted in us at birth. Thus, as ancient Israel pointed out to the world, idolatry is always slavery. It follows that freedom cannot be experienced if allegiance is given to any being or force less than the transcendent One.

But how is the transcendent One to be known? How is he distinguished from the other gods, who likewise make a claim on human allegiance? According to the biblical tradition, he is distinguished by his free choice of Israel—YHWH is not Israel's tribal god—and by the terms of his covenant, especially his ethical demands, which are absolute, even overriding its ritual prescriptions. While ethics is certainly not a discovery of ancient Israel, nor is the notion that law is divinely revealed, what is unique is the claim that ethics, and a very high ethical standard at that, constituted the essence of the divine requirement of human beings. "What does the Lord thy God ask of thee, but to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with thy God?" The prophetic injunction, often taken by modern liberals to imply dispensing with the requirements of religion in the narrow sense, was not so taken at the time. Rather, it pointed to the difference between means and ends. Religion is to be the means to ethical behavior. Fanaticism inverts and perverts this relationship.

We are getting closer to a possible answer to the question with which we began. Fanaticism is always idolatry. Religion itself, at all times and in all places, runs the risk of turning into idolatry. Even the true God can be worshipped in an idolatrous way. And even true religion can become its own idol. When that happens, loyalty to the religion as a social institution replaces fidelity to the covenant with the transcendent Divine. More generally, the religion then becomes an object of an emotion rather like patriotism in the debased sense of "my country, right or wrong." The institution must be defended against criticism, even when criticism might be justified. And those outside are feared and hated, simply because they are outsiders. It is only a small step then to determining that it is right to kill them.

Idolatry in religion fights against spirituality. It narrows vision to the point that nothing can be seen as good unless it belongs within the framework of the religion. Human beings are thus defined not by their essential humanity, but by their religious status as within or without the fold. Such attitudes can lead

to puritanism in the worst sense, when all normal pleasurable human activities are despised and rejected because they are not religion. Music and art may be seen as essentially profane, lacking any connection to the spiritual dimension. Sexual agendas can become single issues, obliterating from consciousness more transcendent concerns. Idolatry can also justify the hatred of outsiders, as if God needed defense against human foes. If he is an idol, clearly he does. Equally clearly, the transcendent God does not need such human aid.

It follows that if religion is to be preserved from its own idolatrous tendencies, it must be open to criticism. Its officials must be held accountable before the laws they administer. In the Bible, neither priest nor king is above the Law, and no great figure in the history of the people, not even Moses, is presented as perfect. Thus the criticism of religion on theological, philosophical, and historical grounds can be seen as part of the struggle against idolatry. Those who resist it, divinizing religion itself, run the risk of becoming idolaters and thus fanatics.

Asceticism, self-punishment for religious reasons, seems to have an especially intimate relationship with fanaticism. As the psychoanalysts have taught us, you cannot love others unless you first love yourself. Spirituality may therefore be connected with a certain perception of oneself as ontologically good rather than bad, though subject to bad impulses. Thus the ascetic no longer experiences the Self as a divine creation, but something to be afflicted and punished before the person can become acceptable to God. There is plenty of evidence for the generalization that people with such hostile attitudes to themselves are given to hating and persecuting others when they are in a position to do so.

Perhaps then it is not (as expected) religion that determines whether people will be spiritual, but some other factor, hereditary or environmental. Or perhaps it is not determined at all, but is simply the result of free choice. We might reverse the expected proposition, and say that on the contrary it is spirituality that leads to religion. But obviously this would also be too simple, since some spiritual people, nowadays at any rate, do not profess any religion. And we have already seen that other factors can be at work in religion, including the possibility that it could serve as an outlet for hate.

Since Judaism, perhaps more than any other religion, has been aware of the nature and the danger of idolatry, we might ask whether Judaism should be considered a religion at all. Clearly, in its traditional form it would not. Even the term is foreign to earlier Judaism. The Hebrew word for religion, *dat*, appears to have been introduced into the language in the mediaeval period from Aramaic and perhaps ultimately from non-Semitic sources. However, in the post-Napoleonic era, Judaism clearly became a religion for some members of society, embraced by birth or choice, rather than being the law of the whole community. "Frenchmen of the Mosaic persuasion" and their equivalents have clearly chosen their religion among existing alternatives, even when the choice was simply to remain rather than to leave and assimilate.

When religion is thus chosen from the human side, there is a special risk of some of the religious pathologies discussed entering into the scene. Religion then becomes a function of human piety and devotional fervor. In this connection, some of the thought of Sephardic Jewry becomes of special interest. As José Faur has shown,⁷ leading Sephardic thinkers, such as Judah HaLevi, were extremely suspicious of what we should today call religion. (In Arabic, they referred to *ijtihad*, meaning human religious enthusiasm or devotion. The word evidently comes from the same root as *jihad*.) They saw in such humanly inspired devotion a danger of *avodah zara*, an expression often translated as idolatry, but more precisely meaning alien worship. They took *avodah zara* to mean a form of worship, Jewish or otherwise, not prescribed by the Torah, but arising from human initiative. It seems that what they found dangerous was human initiative in matters of religion, which always runs the risk of contamination by the idolatrous mind. They found the religious enthusiasm that seeks to do *more* than the Torah prescribes as dangerous as the laxity that is content with *less*.

Just as divine speech in revelation saves us from human imagination in the realm of the divine, so divine regulation of worship saves us from idolatrous distortions in religious behavior. Thus, self-imposed sacrifices are not acceptable. The idolatrous, or pagan, mind believes that God's favor can be bought by extreme sacrifice or self-mortification. This is idolatrous because it involves a false picture of God, as less compassionate—and more manipulable—than he has revealed himself to be. Such attitudes can easily lead, as they apparently did among Israel's neighbors, to abominations such as child sacrifice. Today, *ijtihad* leads young men from Hamas to believe that their suicidal murders of innocent civilians are pleasing to God and will win them a place in paradise. Moderation in religion, but the highest standards in ethics, seemed to these Sephardic philosophers to be what God has prescribed for us, and therefore wants.

Such ideas may not make conventional saints, such as romantics admire because they go in for extreme self-sacrifice. They will also not breed fanatics. They may even tend to bring about true goodness.

NOTES

1. Ian Kent, MD., and William Nicholls, *I AMness: The Discovery of the Self Beyond the Ego* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971).

2. Cf. among a quite extensive literature, David Landau, *Piety and Power: The World of Jewish Fundamentalism* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); Lawrence J. Silberstein, ed., *Jewish Fundamentalism in Comparative Perspective: Religion, Ideology and the Crisis of Modernity* (New York: New York University Press, 1993).

3. Cf. Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1996). While this book has been found highly controversial, especially among German historians, it rests upon a considerable amount of empirical research. In fact, I find that it independently documents and sustains the thesis I advanced in my own *Christian Antisemitism* on the basis of a historical and theological understanding of anti-Semitism. I argued that the Nazi assault on the Jews, requiring as it did the cooperation of many thousands of ordinary Germans who were not party loyalists, would have been impossible without the heritage of Christian anti-Semitism in German culture,

convincing people that Jews were bad and dangerous, even though such Christian ideas may not always have been fully present to their conscious minds. Goldhagen comes to the same conclusion, on the basis of both a theoretical discussion of anti-Semitism and his empirical research.

4. William Nicholls, *Christian Antisemitism: A History of Hate* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1993), pp. 249–259.

5. There have been many important discussions of idolatry in Jewish tradition, ably analyzed by Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit in their *Idolatry*, translated by Naomi Goldblum (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992). Space forbids discussion of these in detail. The informed reader will recognize that the approach in the text is somewhat Maimonidean.

6. See Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel, From its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile*, translated by Moshe Greenberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

7. Cf. José Faur, *In the Shadow of History: Jews and Conversos at the Dawn of Modernity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 11–15, and especially pp. 21f, the section entitled, “Religious Fervor and the Displacement of Morality.”

Sarah and Isaac

The rabbis when they write
about the story of Isaac
and his father Abraham
often forget Sarah,
the mother.
When they do remember
they wonder if she knew
God's request,
if she knew and let them go anyway.

But, no, I am certain
she couldn't have known
until afterward
And it was that alone,
not old age,
that killed her.

I am convinced
she could have given him up to Rebecca.
That was like
giving him to the future
A mother's obligation.
But not to the pile of wood,
not to the knife
in his father's hand
or in God's.

She could not have bound him over
with leather thongs.
She could not have watched Abraham
as he tied down his son.
This son, this Isaac, was bound to her
more tightly than to a pile of wood,
more securely than to God.
The binding was giving him to death.
No mother could do that
Least of all a Jewish mother
Not without first wrestling with God
or with the angels.

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Generations

Daughter of pogroms
my grandmother was wary
of strangers.
She never forgot the nearness of the enemy
Even while intent on
discussing potato brandy
with the Ukrainian
peasant and his thick boots.

My mother inherited
a little of the ghetto
She was carried away from pogroms
in a ship's hold
looking for the Statue of Liberty.
She argued for equality
in the promised land.

And I was born thereafter
at the edge of the Shoah
that would prove
my grandmother right
And cover my mother's arguments
with a shroud of ashes.

At seven I saw the bodies
on newsreels.
Had I been born over there
(I counted the years)
I would have been among them
in the pit.
At fifteen I read about lynchings,
American pogroms.
My grandmother was right
to be wary of strangers
knowing her enemy.

But what do I tell my children
who believe there are no more pogroms
and no more lynchings
I only pray they are right
But in my ear
I hear my grandmother's voice.

Nationalism, the Jews, and Art History

MARGARET OLIN

1. Introduction: Vienna 1980

ANTI-SEMITIC ART HISTORIANS, WE ASSUME, NEED NOT write anti-Semitic art history. Granted, Orientalism, of which anti-Semitism is a subcategory, has been convincingly exposed in many disciplines.¹ Yet we trust scholarly objectivity to keep art history free of anti-Semitism, holding Jewish art itself responsible for the scant attention paid to it, the commandment against the making of graven images presumably insuring that there was not much to talk about.² To prove anti-Semitism in art history would take more than a tally of anti-Semitic remarks made by classic art historians such as Jacob Burckhardt.³ It must be shown to play a role in shaping the discourse of art history, in dictating its terms, or in regulating access to the canon of objects deserving of study. My reflections here will be brief and fragmentary, their focus narrow and personal, but in them, I will question the habits of mind that make the exclusion of Jewish art from the discourse of art history appear natural and inevitable.⁴

I begin in 1980, during a year of research in Vienna. Reminders of anti-Semitism played at the margins of my work on art historical theory at the turn of the century. In the archives I read scholarly correspondence that interrupted theoretical discussions to complain about anti-Semitic incidents, and newspapers that juxtaposed art reviews with notices of pogroms or announcements of excursions for anti-Semites to the International Exposition in Paris in 1900.⁵ Among correspondence about historical monuments, I was struck by a letter that an unknown correspondent named "Richard" sent in 1902 to the art historian Franz Wickhoff. He sought Wickhoff's support in an effort to prevent the construction of a museum by the architect Otto Wagner on Vienna's Karlsplatz, home to Johann Fischer von Erlach's eighteenth-century Church of St. Charles Borromeus (p. 475). Fearing that Wagner's opulent structure would clash with Fischer's masterpiece, he urged the professor to take immediate action: "Say that in front of your window a dear, helpless merchant, who is harmlessly going about his business and living modestly without bothering anyone else—let's call him David Cohn—is set upon and strangled by a couple of punks. You'd see that. And, Herr Hofrat, since, to speak in Viennese terms, you're a good, lovable chap—you'd—well you wouldn't exactly go charging down there immediately and place

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yourself at his service, but you would make an earnest attempt to call out for help—with all your strength. Now, David Cohn is a good man, but there are many, many of that sort around; for the purposes of cultural history he can easily be replaced. Even Herr Süß must admit that! But I will tell you, and prove it, that presently in Vienna artistic punks, a pair of brutal architects, want to attack and murder not an innocent Jew, but the great Church of St. Charles by Karl Fischer von Erlach! Cry out and protest!”⁶

Wagner’s design was not built and Fischer’s church remains in all its grandeur unfettered by the bland modernist museum built next to it after World War II.⁷ But the correspondent was wrong about the David Cohns. Their supply was not unlimited. They were killed or fled and the good, lovable chaps of Vienna closed their windows and did not call out for help. By the time I read the letter, the Jewish presence in Vienna was little more than a memory.

My interdisciplinary dissertation involved an art historian known for his work in formal theory, historical preservation, and the reevaluation of the neglected art of the Late Roman Empire.⁸ I studied his formal theories in relation to other Viennese cultural contributions in music, psychoanalysis, philosophy, and architecture. To do so, I deployed historical, psychological, literary critical and philosophical methods. Broad though it was, however, my scholarship could not encompass the documents of anti-Semitism that surrounded it. The connection between the aesthetic disruption of Karlsplatz and the violence against David Cohn was poetic but to pursue it would be unscholarly.⁹ I treated any commotion that might have occurred outside a Viennese professor’s window as at worst a momentary distraction, like the anti-Semitic tract that appeared in my room when my landlady discovered I was Jewish. It distracted me briefly from my research but did not affect the way I wrote it up.

A colleague studying a logical disputation in the late fourteenth century encountered on a building in central Vienna a fifteenth century inscription celebrating a pogrom. When further research revealed a connection between the commemorated pogrom and the logical disputation that preceded it, he concluded that abstract positions of theologians can “help shape decisions and justify actions that left an indelible imprint on the lives of their peers, the leaders of the Hussite movement, and the Viennese Jews.”¹⁰ My letter, too, suggested a context that intellectual history alone did not: it indicated that formal art history was not conceived and hotly debated in the serene and rarefied atmosphere of the ivory tower. Yet I reacted to my archival material as if it were. When, for example, an assistant in the Berlin print cabinet in the 1880s characterized a scholar as “uncouth” because he had assigned an observant Jew the topic of the “blood of the lamb,” I found myself siding against the assistant. Jewish Medievalists, I reasoned, cannot expect to avoid Christian iconography. My response assumed a realm of pure scholarship above religious or ethnic considerations.

The assistant assumed no such thing. Even if his distress was unjustified, however, it remains a historical fact worthy of analysis. Yet instead of placing his complaint in a historical context, I argued against a young man who died

in 1888 as though he stood before me in 1980. My misperception of his environment may have been due to a willful misperception of my own: to admit the possibility that seemingly disinterested scholarly research can be used as a weapon to attack an ethnic group meant to relinquish for myself as well as others the possibility of retreat into a pure realm of ideas. In trying now to make amends for my oversight, I do so in part to validate the attempt that he and others made within the constraints of their discipline, to use it as a weapon against the ethnic hatred of their time.

2. An Anti-Semitic Art History

At least one serious scholar incorporated anti-Semitism directly into his art historical research. Born in 1862, Josef Strzygowski is still remembered for his success in securing the Middle East, Asia Minor, and India a place on the art historical agenda; his works are still considered standard in the field.¹¹ There is some irony in his efforts on behalf of these marginalized areas, however, for they were directly inspired by his upbringing in a German-speaking area of Polish Silesia in 1864, which left him an ardent German nationalist.¹² Initially given a tradesman's education, he rose to become professor of art history first in Graz then in Vienna. He led armies of scholars into Syria, Persia, and Egypt to discover evidence of achievements he thought led from the Greek-influenced Hellenistic Orient to classic Roman, Romanesque, and even Gothic art and architecture.

His mode of argumentation reveals his nationalistic purpose. In *Orient oder Rom* he traced Hellenistic influence in a variety of social groups, but routinely ascribed motifs and monuments on the basis of national character. The ornament on the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, for example, is Greek because it was made by "an artist devoted with love to his work, a spirit aimed at the painterly-attractive, not the Roman, academically trained engineer."¹³ The tasteless, unartistic Ashburnham Pentateuch cannot have been painted by Germanic artists, whose works are "full of the finest rhythm and an unusual ideal unity of spatial order." It must be by "Jewish Christians."¹⁴ Artistic cultures were not in question, Strzygowski stressed: "it is the contrast of two races, that to which the Greeks and Romans belong and the Semitic."¹⁵ The book ends as the Orient, crippled by Semites, is about to succumb to "the great Germanic artistic flowering in the North."¹⁶

Strzygowski softened his racist rhetoric in *Orient oder Rom* but unleashed it in full force in an essay for general readers. Evoking Delacroix's *Massacre at Chios*, he compared the spotless maiden of Greek independence, abducted by a ruthless Turk in the painting, to the beautiful maiden of Hellenic art who sells herself to an "old Semite."¹⁷ The Semite keeps her as the jewel of his harem, surrounded by the "Semitic pack" teeming with silk, gold, and jewels. This hedonistic art culminated in proliferations of flat patterns that "celebrated their orgies in the Arabesque."¹⁸ To capture the tenacity of the race that created it,

Strzygowski cites the phrase “der ewige Jude” (Eternal Jew), thus uniting Jew and “ruthless Turk” in a narrative that had little to do with either.¹⁹

The very terms suggest fear of miscegenation, and indeed, in the same essay Strzygowski not only mourned the disintegration of the race of Hellas, he compared it to the German race, worried that it would similarly lose its purity. Germany, apparently a masculine version of Greece, would not be raped but would succumb to Italy, a “prostitute from whose magic even the sunny, Greek-like barbarians of the North cannot tear themselves away during the Middle Ages.”²⁰ Italy’s allure threatened to turn the “powerful Germanic breed” to mannerism.²¹

Strzygowski celebrated the “blood relations” that bound Germans. Dürer and Rembrandt, he wrote, both “acquired German depth of feeling at the start as their parental inheritance.”²² German Jewish artists, however, did not have depth of feeling by birthright, as we infer from a 1907 critique of the painter Max Liebermann: “In order to salvage the title of art for painting that lacks ideas of its own, he called the search after new variations in artistic qualities ‘fantasy.’ Naturally fantasy takes place completely in the artist: it emerges from purely sensory presuppositions. At the basis of this concept is race.”²³ In the early twentieth century, the term “race” was as likely to signify culture as blood. Indeed, Liebermann’s enthusiasm for French Impressionism, which he shared with other German painters, occasionally led a critic to deny him a Germanic pedigree.²⁴ But Strzygowski makes his meaning clear in a footnote: “Notice also that Orientals in general have considerable fantasy, but this is only seldom purified into what is at issue in art: the need for a simple and clear expression of impulses of the soul, over and above sensuality.”²⁵ Liebermann, an assimilated Jewish painter born and raised in Berlin, must have had the “Oriental” in his blood, since it was certainly not in his culture.

Strzygowski waited impatiently for the great savior of German art, who will enable “us Germans to conquer the artistic heights. . . . Hans von Marées sensed the problem. When will the hero come that will solve it? When the time that will bring him forth?”²⁶ When the savior appeared, not only of German art, but of all German culture, Strzygowski was ready. Before he died in 1941 he vowed to continue to serve his Führer through his work.²⁷

Because his early, often quoted works were not yet Nazi, scholars disassociate these valuable contributions to the field from the verbose rantings of his last decade about emigre Jewish art historians who led international conspiracies from New York.²⁸ Whatever good came out of them, however, his early trips to the Middle East were conditioned by pan-Germanic ideological concerns just as were his later speculative works. Strzygowski’s ethnic ideas were not peripheral to but at the heart of his art history. For he used formal analysis, in itself a neutral tool, to identify not merely similarities but blood relationships and pathways not of influence but of migration, conquest, and miscegenation. From the beginning, Strzygowski’s agonistic art history was a battle cry of the racist and a warning against cultural influence.²⁹ Real blood could flow from such arguments.

3. The Nationality Without Art

Strzygowski's anti-Semitic art history did not transgress accepted art historical patterns because art history's relationship to nationalism imbued it with a pattern of aims and categories shared with anti-Semitism. Modern anti-Semitism was part of a structure of racism that helped give nationhood a basis in biology, while narratives of art history chronicled a people's emerging awareness of nationhood, giving its culmination in political legitimization the look of inevitability. The two strands united because cultural phenomena were among the diverse, conflicting criteria by which nineteenth century scholars classified people into races or nations.³⁰

In German-speaking countries, absorbed in activities relating to the pursuit and achievement of German unity, nationalism and art history were intertwined. In the eighteenth century, when G. E. Herder began to use language as a criterion to identify a shared cultural heritage that makes up a people in the sense of modern nationhood, J. J. Winckelmann had already inaugurated modern art historical scholarship by tying Greek art to Greek climate, culture, and form of government.³¹ The visual was thoroughly bound up in the national by the time German Romanticism promoted Gothic as a German national style, and certain media, such as wood, were defined as German and cultivated.³² In the late nineteenth century, Bismarck advocated the use of the German typeface Fraktur instead of Latin type.³³ Institutional art history grew up in the midst of such phenomena, as scholars appointed to posts in museums and universities directly by the governments of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland provided scholarship to support national claims.³⁴

While a nation can be viewed as a contingent phenomenon, for nationalists it served as the unchanging element that furnished history with coherence. This function made the investigation of origins central to nationalistic narratives. A "national art," scholars argued, must be grounded in primal traits identifiable in their pure form in early handicraft and ornament.³⁵ They sought to define German nationhood through the works of tribes that later became German. Hubert Janitschek searched "back to the darkness of the tribal past" for "the soft and gradually perceptible stirrings of the artistic spirit of the Germanic tribes."³⁶ His history of German painting dated official nationhood to the Treaty of Verdun in 843 and located in art the awakening and developing of a consciousness of German identity that preexisted even that early date.³⁷ In Sweden, Sophus Müller attributed the growth of his own discipline of prehistoric archaeology to the good powers that supported "the urge of the people for self recognition and their love for the monuments of their prehistory."³⁸

The language of nationalism could not consist in the name of just one nation, however.³⁹ Nationalists had to compare or contrast their own nationality to a network of alternative ones. To define Gothic as German was to deny that it was French. To define the German spirit as like the Hellenic required a definition of both peoples. Industrious, practical Romans and beauty-loving

Greeks were crucial to the construction of Germanic spiritual depth. The importance of ethnic Others to the shaping of German identity meant that a German scholar could form a consciousness of German identity in studies of the art of ancient Rome, baroque Italy, the Levant or India. Jews were one element in this vast complex.

One might imagine that an art history for which nationalists set the terms of the discourse, in which the contributions of countries, peoples, and races or the place of a work in a unified evolutionary development headed the scholarly agenda, had little room for Jewish art. After all, like gender minorities, Jews had no single community and geographical location; there was no established narrative into which “Jewish art history” could fit, and only a limited market for histories of Jewish monuments or the professors who specialized in them. Yet the biblical underpinnings of nineteenth century surveys made an explicit Jewish appearance obligatory, albeit sometimes brief, and always confined to what could be culled from the Hebrew bible. Even here, the cherub-bedecked ark of the tabernacle was given short shrift compared to the architectural projects of Solomon.⁴⁰ Since these monuments do not survive, most scholars professed ignorance of Jewish artistic origins, but this did not keep them from drawing wide-ranging conclusions about the Jewish artistic character. The archaeologists Perrot and Chipiez meticulously reconstructed the temples of Solomon and even Ezekiel in fanciful detail, concluding that Jews were the “least artistic of the great peoples of antiquity.”⁴¹ According to Elie Faure while “Their whole effort was employed in raising a single edifice, the house of a terrible and solitary god,” yet it proved unworthy of “that Jewish genius, so grandly synthetical, but closed and jealous . . . whose voice of iron has traversed the ages.”⁴²

Others, citing the participation of Phoenician artists in the building of the temple, concluded that Jews had no art at all. Wilhelm Lübke wrote in his survey in 1888 that “Jews, having no artistic sensibility of their own, borrowed architectural forms on an eclectic principle from the nations dwelling around them.”⁴³ The remark sounds innocent from a postmodern standpoint, but for Lübke to characterize Jews as a people who borrowed from others the art they could not create on their own lent an historical basis to the anti-Semitic stereotype of Jews as chameleon-like parasites. With reference to such ancient forebears, Max Liebermann’s love of French art could be explained as owing to the chameleon quality of the Jew rather than an affinity for the Gauls. Such insinuations may have encouraged Heinrich Wölfflin explicitly to stress Liebermann’s identity as a Berliner in a 1927 review in a Berlin journal.⁴⁴

The obligatory discussion of the non-artistic character of Jews in nineteenth century surveys was part of a larger effort to affirm the purity of Greek art. The de-Semitization of classic Greece became an important scholarly project in the nineteenth century because Greeks had close relations with Semitic peoples (but not Jews) at formative stages in their development. Scholars were so successful at defining Myceneans as Aryan ancestors of the Greeks and downplaying Egyptian or Assyrian influences on Greek art that

even art historians without an ax to grind against “Semites” thought it necessary to distinguish Oriental contributions to Greek art from the pure Greek component, tracing to Mycenaean art the creative, dynamic impulses in Greek art that brought an element of change to static Oriental art.⁴⁵

Jews were not only seen as a people without art, however. The commandment forbidding graven images was used to portray them, more insidiously, as a people against art. The supposedly intolerant and domineering Hebrew God, jealous of the reverence for images, is an assumption that made its way from anti-Semitic tracts to a central art historical assumption.⁴⁶ In an inspired early essay, Hegel painted a brilliant picture of the Jews as representations of pure isolating negativity. The spiritual emptiness of the Jews reflected emptiness in all their creations: their sanctuary was an “empty room,” their day dedicated to God an “empty time,” their God invisible.⁴⁷ “They despise the image because it does not manage them, and they have no inkling of its deification in the enjoyment of beauty or in a lover’s intuition.”⁴⁸

This extreme negativity distinguished Jews even from other “Semites” or “Orientals” who at least possessed a decorative tradition. At best Jews were written out of art history as a people defined by lack: lack of history, of land, and of art.⁴⁹ As an anti-artistic people, however, Jews grew into a threatening anti-nationality, and could re-enter art history as the villain. Just as Richard Wagner did not pity Jews for an alleged lack of musical ability, but feared them as a threat to Western music, so writers like Strzygowski could portray Semitic anti-art as a diabolical force, and thus give anti-Semitism a voice at the heart of art history.⁵⁰

4. Universal Art History

Nationalism and its attendant racism were and are as difficult to remove from art history as from any other area of life. Yet from the beginning, attempts were made to combat anti-Semitism by focusing on the artistic achievements of Jews. In fact, the encouragement of Jewish art was important to Zionism, under whose auspices an art academy was founded in Palestine, named after Bezal’el, the maker of the cherub-bedecked ornaments of the tabernacle ignored by surveys of art history.⁵¹ Whether undertaken by Jews or Christians, however, attempts to promote Jewish art usually partook of the prevailing view of Jews as non-visual. For example, the organizers of the first exhibit of Jewish artists in Berlin in 1907, featuring Maurycy Gottlieb, Artur Markowicz, Josef Oppenheimer, Camille Pissaro, and Lesser Ury, began the catalogue by assuming that Jewish artists faced a tradition hostile to the visual arts.⁵² Martin Buber expressed stronger sentiments in his introduction to a book celebrating the art of well-known Jewish artists such as Liebermann and Josef Israels along with lesser known artists identified with Jewish subjects. Like anti-Semites, he attributed the non-visibility of Jews to “racial characteristics.” His reference was not to “blood,” but to the climate, conditions, and social structure of early Jewish life, yet the results were grim all the same. In his view, the Jews’ inability to visualize constricted their

Weltanschauung (world view) to “I-relationships,” or function, making it impossible to see the beauty of the closed form like the Greek, or the spirituality in the objects around them like the Hindu. In the Diaspora, the limitation of Jews to money-dealing stifled emerging visual as well as spiritual urges. “This is when religious law became all powerful. The human body is despicable. Beauty is an unknown value. Seeing is a sin. Art is a sin. . . . Everything creative is smothered at its first appearance.”⁵³

To a non-Jewish reader, such judgments may appear damning. Buber’s readership, however, was for the most part Jewish, since his book appeared under Zionist auspices. He saw the recent developments in Jewish art as part of a restructuring of Jewish culture beginning with Hasidism in the eighteenth century and continuing with emancipation. His concept of the spiritualization of Jewish relational tendencies led Buber later to the dialogism of his *I and Thou*.⁵⁴ In his view the construction of a specifically Jewish art would contribute significantly to a dawning modern age, “whose essence seems to be the dissolution of substance into relationships and its transfiguration into spiritual values.”⁵⁵ A non-visual people could contribute to art in an immaterial age.

Buber was among the first Jewish thinkers to interpret tendencies within Judaism to coincide with contemporary trends.⁵⁶ A later one was Harold Rosenberg, who like Buber appeared uneasy with Jewish non-visibility. While he wrote searching essays on Jewish identity, he was unable to detect anything specifically Jewish in art when confronted with the problem in a lecture in the Jewish Museum.⁵⁷ With his tongue in his cheek, however, he turned the prohibition against images in the second commandment into an artistic manifesto, thereby transforming the ancient Jews into forerunners of the anti-art, found-art, and conceptual-art movements, stopping short only of calling them surrealists.⁵⁸

There were, however, challenges to the prevailing interpretation of the second commandment. The most ardent challenger was the Hungarian David Kaufmann, who in the late nineteenth century produced the first scholarly studies of Jewish art in synagogues and manuscripts, including, in his appendix to an 1898 Vienna edition of the Sarajevo Haggadah, the first one to appear in a mainstream art historical publication.⁵⁹ Yet the prominent Viennese art historian Julius von Schlosser, who edited the volume, strewed his contributions with speculations about Jewish racial identity discomfiting indeed in a philosemitic context. Although the remarks were probably meant to confound the simplistic assumptions of his contemporaries, Schlosser, who was antagonistic to racism and regarded himself as an Italian-German crossbreed, demonstrates the inseparability of racial and art historical speculation.⁶⁰ Reviewing Schlosser’s edition, the art historian Adolf Goldschmidt found no indication that such Jewish art took part in an “artistic development of its own.”⁶¹ The very structure of art history marginalized the Haggadah.

Another way to combat the deleterious effects of nationalist art history was to foster the belief in the universality of humanity, denying difference or

seeking a common denominator beneath it, and identifying, as Sartre pointed out in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, with universals and abstractions. In art, Jews and other anti-nationalists embraced the international style, formalist criticism, and abstract art.⁶² With no identifiable Jewish style to betray them, Jews could disappear into formalism. Unlike Marxism, which proposed to change the social structures that led to anti-Semitism, the formalist internationale offered a comfortable refuge, within received boundaries of art history, making art appear applicable to the whole of humankind, a pure realm of ideas not associated with specific racial, ethnic, or political agendas. And religious ones. Art offered Christians as well as Jews a secular religion to replace faith lost in the enlightenment. For Jews, however, the denial of religious meaning allowed them in addition to worship at Renaissance altarpieces without the necessity of a formal conversion, and to dispense completely with the religious meanings of awkward topics such as the blood of the lamb. Even better, it opened non-religious art to devotional purposes, which perhaps explains the quasi-religious imagery of critics as diverse as Harold Rosenberg and Michael Fried in praise of abstract art, itself created largely by Jews.⁶³

Nevertheless, universalism ran dangers. It could amalgamate Jewish and Christian norms, as did an early writer on the synagogue of Dura-Europos.⁶⁴ Worse, it could erect a standard and exclude as deviant those who did not conform. Gestalt psychology, for example, postulated a biophysical relationship between human response to form and internal molecular organization. Its insights could, however, be used to bolster racial stereotypes. Rudolf Arnheim came close on occasion to turning Gestalt into a new phrenology, suggesting that the external forms of “criminals and homosexuals” were related to the internal molecular organization that made them “deviants.” To bolster his call for an examination of the relation between the “spirit” of national groups and the configuration of their gestures he cited a study of Jewish and Italian communities in Brooklyn.⁶⁵

Arnheim was not the only one whose universalist model was sabotaged by the discussion of “peoples.” Bernard Berenson, whose devotion to the secular worship of Renaissance altarpieces aided him to produce many popular volumes about Renaissance art and to influence generations of connoisseurs who courted him at his Villa i Tatti in Florence, was keenly aware of the dangers of nationalism. Writing in 1938, partly in response to the Nazi threat, he condemned the search for influence because it “is seldom free of nationalistic prejudices.” Expressing his universalism, he wrote “My tendencies toward universalism and timelessness have disinclined me to dwell on differences that seem slight compared with wide and deep resemblances, and have induced me to look for the same human quality in every individual.” Yet he laid a trap for himself when he continued: “And furthermore to erect the same qualities into ultimate standards and to appraise societies as well as individuals by the extent to which they have possessed these qualities.”⁶⁶ Thus like George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, which

found some animals more equal than others, he found some societies more universally human than others.

These remarks in his *Aesthetics and History in the Visual Arts* appear in a discussion of Jewish art that could earn him a place in the pantheon of self-hating Jews.⁶⁷ Following the traditional formulas, Berenson consigns Jews to a dismal artistic existence: in some passages they lack a national art; in others they lack art altogether. He appears to forget his own rejection of the cult of originality when he condemns Jews as imitators: "Neither they themselves nor their forebears possessed any kind of plastic or even mechanical ability. . . . As a matter of fact Israel through the ages has manifested nothing essentially national in the plastic arts, neither in antiquity, nor through the Middle Ages, nor to-day. The coinage of their Maccabean period is the poorest Hellenistic. . . . In later periods Jews imitated the art of the peoples among whom they were scattered, to the pitiful extent that they made use of art at all. Even in recent years when Jews emancipated from the ghetto have taken to painting and sculpture and architecture, they have proved neither original nor in the least Jewish. I defy anyone to point out in the work of Liebermann, Pissarro, Rothenstein, Modigliani, Messel, Antokolskij, Epstein, Chagall, or Soutine, anything excepting subject matter that is specifically Jewish."⁶⁸

The assimilated nature of Pissaro's art may be hard to refute, but Berenson's remarkable leap from Maccabean coinage to the avant garde movements of his own youth suggests that for him the problem is racial.⁶⁹ He himself entertains this possibility: "The Jews like their Ishmaelite cousins the Arabs, and indeed perhaps like all pure Semites (if such there be), have displayed little talent for the visual, and almost none for the figure arts."

These are extreme examples, but the structures of formal art history made it difficult to escape them even if one wanted to. Clement Greenberg, for example, who, like Rosenberg, wrote outside of artistic contexts with great sensitivity about the relation between a historically Jewish and universally human sensibility, and grappled with issues of assimilation, was at a loss to explain why the "apocalyptic landscapes" of the Jewish painter Mordecai Ardon recalled to him the "old testament."⁷⁰ "Far be it from me to see an eternal Jewish soul any more than an eternal Anglo-Saxon one," he sputters, "but . . ."⁷¹ An explanation based on traditions of biblical landscape or imagery might conceivably have helped him, but formalism forbade all but stylistic explanations, just as, for Rosenberg, the only acceptable criteria of Jewish art would have been stylistic.⁷² Although formalism helped Greenberg handle Christian art and even surrealism, whose iconography he disliked, it served him ill here and in discussions of Chagall and even Ezra Pound, whose fascist poems he is driven to find fault with formally in order to justify his dislike of them.⁷³ The separation between art and life with which he struggles in these writings recalls his view of Judaism in the old world. There, too, what really mattered, the spiritual, had to be separated strictly from life.⁷⁴

The formalist model of universalism failed to extirpate racism in part because it appropriated the rhetoric of miscegenation. The longing for purity that pervaded modernism found expression in the abhorrence of “hybrid” styles and mixed genres. To the Islamicist Herzfeld, for example, “hybrid” Persian arts appropriating misunderstood Greek forms could have historical but not aesthetic interest.⁷⁵ Greenberg’s “Toward a New Laocoon” personified artistic media and characterized literature in art as a foreign infiltrating agent. As a socialist, Greenberg imported class struggle into the arts, labeling literature “dominant” and visual art “subservient,” but his worries over their mixture come out of a different discourse. Here the medium is at the quasi-biological basis of art, and Greenberg espouses its “purity.”⁷⁶ Universalist notions of art did not extinguish racism in repressing it, but only displaced it into another realm.

5. A Cosmopolitan Art History

My reflections from Vienna have by now migrated to the United States along with many of the scholars I studied. In fact, my dissertation on early formalism researched there was addressed to formalism as I knew it here, although certainly not because I detected any racist tendency in it. Rather, I wished to focus my—impure—interdisciplinary lens on a theory I thought had begun with promise but in time had run aground. Yet the racism I did not see in early twentieth century formalism was well understood by those surrounded by it in *fin de siècle* Vienna.

After World War Two, scholars ignored Strzygowski’s eroticized anti-Semitism, but his contemporaries were well aware of it, because it emerged from a battle over ethnicities in which the entire art historical community of Vienna was engaged. Aligned against his pan-German position were scholars who took the part of the multi-national empire of which Vienna was the center. Its unity was threatened by the pan-nationalism of various groups such as the Slavs and the Germans, whose empires were contiguous with Austria-Hungary, as well as the nationalisms of smaller sub-groups among them such groups as the Bohemians. Austrian scholars, sensitive to the role of culture in nationalism, confirmed the existence of ethnic traits just as did German nationalists, but they battled ethnic isolation, arguing for the contribution of each nationality to a larger multi-ethnic entity, and to history conceived as a world-wide development. Like the multiculturalists among us, they denied the value of “purity.” The relation between their problems and our own makes their celebration of cross-cultural influence instructive.

The platform on which their battle for multiculturalism was waged was Roman art history. The Roman Empire, with its central authority presiding over a mingling of peoples, played the role of a model in this endeavor, and Austrians used it to refute the claims of German nationalists in the area of visual culture. One of them, for example, traced the so-called German script on which

Fraktur was based to an illegible derivation of Carolingian minuscule, itself a revival of clear, classical script.⁷⁷ Another, Alois Riegl, answered Strzygowski's attacks not by contesting his view of the role of Eastern art, but through differing value judgments.⁷⁸ His work routinely argued for the value of such mixtures. Greek "melody" was pure, he wrote, but incomplete without the Oriental "symphony of masses." Use of Italian sources cost Rembrandt some of his popularity among his Northern contemporaries, but these sources were essential to the achievement of his quintessentially Northern goals.⁷⁹

Far from rejecting miscegenation, Austrians often claimed for themselves, as did Julius von Schlosser, Italian roots.⁸⁰ Riegl thought Austria's mission was to introduce Italian ideas to the North, tempering Northern arbitrariness with Italian order.⁸¹ Like Rembrandt, he could expect nationalists to reject him for such statements, and indeed, his attitude toward patriotism, which he regarded as merely expanded self-love did draw fire from historians during the Nazi period.⁸² Italians were not the only foreign infiltrators Riegl's circle tried to defend, however. Although in public, art historians seldom attacked the anti-Semitism that they wrote about in private, and Jews rarely acknowledged their own ethnic identities, yet art historians published, as they do now, for multiple interpretive communities, some of them doubtless aware of political or social nuances. Thus Friedrich Portheim, the young scholar antagonistic to the "blood of the lamb," pioneered the art historical assault on pan-Germanism. His 1886 book on Hellenistic art flatly denied the notion of primeval German traits, attributing all of them to pan-Hellenism instead.⁸³

A Jewish subtext is clearer when the subject is topical rather than historical. The 1911 *Protest der deutschen Künstler* criticized the amount of money and gallery space spent on French art, the importation of French styles, and the consequent rejection of iconography in favor of formal values.⁸⁴ Yet the protesters do not blame the French for cultural imperialism. They instead accuse international conspiracies based on the accumulation of capital, rhetoric that anyone familiar with anti-Semitic discourse will recognize. Furthermore, their targets are not French but German, and most of those mentioned by name are Jewish or of Jewish descent: the painter Max Liebermann, the art critic Julius Meiergraefe and the gallery owner Paul Cassirer. The opponents of the protesters were also quiet on the subject of anti-Semitism, but they printed their answer, which appeared promptly the same year as the protest, in Latin type to counter the Germanic *Fraktur* of the original. Moreover, at least one respondent stated explicitly what others may have thought. The critic Wilhelm Hausenstein disdainfully classified the protesters among the unsavory crowd who "improve the world with the logic of anti-Semitism. . . . They are among those who allow themselves to be represented by . . . the henchmen of Mayor Lueger."⁸⁵ The Habsburg Emperor himself sought to protect the Jews from the likes of the anti-Semitic mayor of Vienna, Karl Lueger.⁸⁶

The specific controversies that led to the absence of Jews in art history have faded somewhat along with the empires that sought to protect their “multicultural” subjects. Yet the structure of art history continues to exclude Jewish art. Even now it is mostly confined to specialized, self-consciously marginalized texts. Indeed, while Carol Krinsky wrote at length, in her introduction to work on synagogues in Europe, about the increased “willingness to admit ethnic studies,” and the appreciation of diversity that made the book possible, she placed it nevertheless on the margin by pleading that a “study of cultural context also helps us to understand the special qualities of the masterful creation.”⁸⁷ Islamic art, tied to distinctive geographical centers, is beginning to find coverage in art historical surveys; yet Jewish monuments merit barely a mention and tend to be integrated into canonical, non-Jewish, artistic developments. Even specialists often do the same. In recent editions of H. W. Janson’s popular survey, the pictorial program of the third century synagogue at Dura Europos appears under the rubric of Roman Art; specialists find its justification in later Christian images, with which its frescos are “fictively linked.”⁸⁸ The Jansons, and even more the authors of the well-respected *The Visual Arts: A History*, still seem to find anomalous the fact that Jews used figured decorations at all.⁸⁹

In other respects, however, art historical scholarship has changed dramatically since surveys of art history were first written in the nineteenth century, and even since I wrote my dissertation. Formalism, for example, has lost its dominance, and the canon of high art is no longer considered art history’s main preoccupation. A study of European synagogues might still have to justify itself, but it would not go about doing so with reference to grander, more canonical works. “Purity” has become problematic, while the term “hybrid” is overused as an accolade. Furthermore, in looking back at the arguments I have been discussing, we recognize their codes. The notion of a code, and a speaking position from which to enunciate it, has also changed the way that nationalities and ethnicities are related to art history. With the decline of the notion of cultural wholes, we approach cultural controversies in terms of the different positions from which a given speaker at a certain moment offers an argument and codes it according to the fluctuating rules of a discourse.

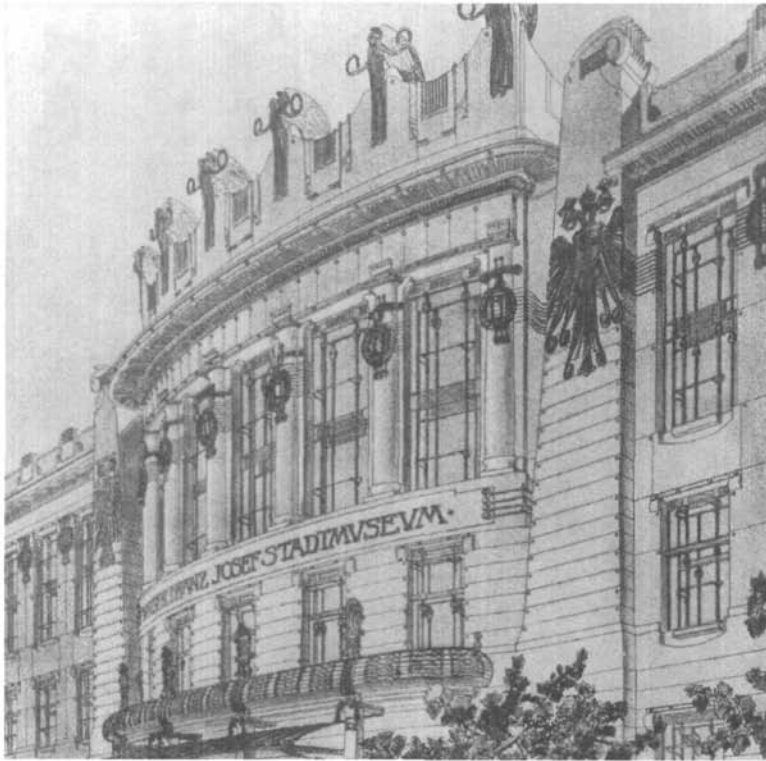
Thus although formalism initially seemed useful as an antidote to anti-Semitism in art, only its replacement by notions of discourse and code allows Jewish monuments to be discussed in terms of the intersecting concerns of Jewish and Christian culture. The synagogue of Dura-Europos, for example, should now be seen in its relation to the community for which it was made and not only in relation to canonic monuments. Indeed, in retrospect, my work was only a symptom of a change in the field that led to the celebration of the hybrid, the delight in “complexity and contradiction,” and the admission of marginalized voices into the field of art history.⁹⁰ Eventually these changes allowed me to hear the voices I had missed, past voices more

aware than I was of the structural relation between art history and sectarian nationalism. The dissolution of the essentialist ideal makes it possible to accord recognition to the problem faced by these past voices without accepting the empire that they thought was the solution.

Finally, there is a difference in the voice in which art history itself is written. This development is supported by theories that comprehend historical writing in relation to the rhetorical devices that it shares with fiction.⁹¹ It encourages art historians to write not only in the abstract voice of objectivity, but to take into account their own speaking positions. It also encourages them to acknowledge the ideological content of historical writing that links history to the present day, making it possible, as I have tried here, to examine the negative consequences for Jewish art history of assumptions accepted even by Jews: the jealous God who supposedly forbade art while proscribing graven images in the second commandment and the necessity to limit art historical study to geographically based evolutionary narratives.⁹² Jews are among the latest of minority groups to take advantage art-historically of the chance to expose the stereotypes that have kept them silent. Other racial, ethnic, and gender minorities preceded them by at least a decade. While an extensive examination of either the Jewish speaking voice or the role of anti-Semitism in art history remains to be done, however, some Jewish art historians have begun to speak from a Jewish position. Some of them have previously explored other minority positions, among them Linda Nochlin, who was a pioneer of feminist art history before she also ventured to speak as a Jew.⁹³

In this essay I speak not only as a Jew but, in my more cosmopolitan speaking position, I intend my words to point beyond Judaism. In this voice and for the sake of symmetry, I return to Vienna for a look at the present state of the war against racism. Like art history, Vienna has also discovered Jews since the time of my research visit. Although Fischer von Erlach's church remains on Karlsplatz as a monument to his greatness, the centrally located Albertinaplatz has a monument to the extinct species of David Cohn. If Cohn managed to escape strangling in 1907, he might have lived to scrub the streets in 1938, although not to see his act memorialized fifty years later in Alfred Hrdlicka's 1988 monument against War and Fascism (p. 476). Racism against the extinct is finally under attack. When I saw it in 1992, it was, appropriately perhaps, being used as a gathering point for refugees from the former Yugoslavia.

In 1983, however, guest workers from Turkey, the paid street scrubbers of the 1980s, could pause from their labors on Karlsplatz to contemplate the sight of their own forebears cast as Oriental warriors. These weapon-brandishing fighters topped the imposing Künstlerhaus art gallery draped by Hans Hollein in a colorful Turkish tent on the occasion of an exhibit marking the three hundredth anniversary of the siege of Vienna by the Turks. This exotic edifice on Karlsplatz finally, if only for the brief moment of the exhibit, eclipsed Fischer's masterpiece.



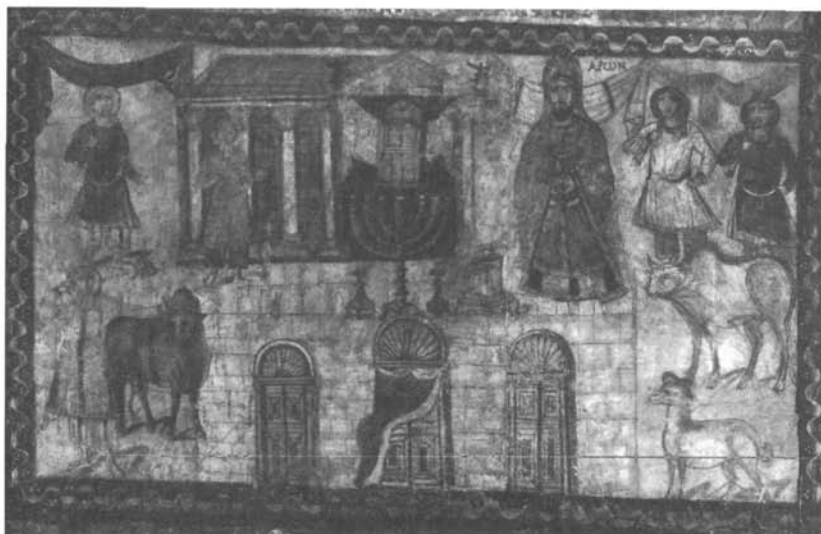
Otto Wagner, View of Central Pavilion, Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien, preliminary competition project, 1902.

From *Der Architekt* 8 (1902), p. 6, Art Institute of Chicago.



Johann Fischer von Erlach, Karlskirche. Vienna, 1716.

Photograph: M. Olin.



Consecration of the Tabernacle. *Wall painting, Synagogue of Dura Europos.*

Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Archive.



Alfred Hrdlicka, "Elderly Jew Scrubbing the Street," detail of Monument Against War and Fascism. Vienna, 1988.

Photograph: M. Olin.

NOTES

1. I wish to thank Kalman Bland for his bibliographical information and Joan Hart for a thorough and perceptive reading that forced me to rethink and rewrite. Norman Kleeblatt urged me to write this essay, and I am grateful for his continuing encouragement. Anti-Semitism is a "subset" of Orientalism even though the term "Semite" would seem to be inclusive. The term "anti-Semitism," however, was coined only in 1870 to refer to the hatred specifically of Jews: Robert Wistrich, *Anti-Semitism: The Longest Hatred* (London: Thames Metheun, 1991), pp. xv–xvi. The most often cited work on the subject of the ideology of scholarship on the Middle East is Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978). Said, however, fails to acknowledge fully the relation between anti-Semitism and Orientalism. He comes closest on pp. 27–28.
2. Heinrich Dilly's essay on German art historians during the Nazi period provides no evidence that even they were particularly involved in writing anti-Semitic art history. Their main concerns appeared to have been elsewhere. Heinrich Dilly, *Deutsche Kunsthistoriker, 1933–1945* (Munich, Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1988).
3. For example, in *Judgments on History and Historians*, translated by Harry Zohn (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), pp. 23, 43–44, Burckhardt makes statements that suggest he believed modern life and economics were dominated by Jews. These statements, however, do not necessarily reflect on this Cicero any more than the works of Paul de Man's mature years can be discredited by the essays he wrote for a collaborative newspaper in Belgium during World War II. Another art historian frequently accused of private anti-Semitism is Wilhelm Bode. Wolfgang Beyrodt, "Wilhelm von Bode (1845–1929)," in *Altmeister moderner Kunstgeschichte*, edited by Heinrich Dilly (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1990), p. 32.
4. The most glaring omission in my discussion is that of the iconographers and iconologists. The most significant omission, that of Erwin Panofsky, will soon be rectified in forthcoming publications of Joan Hart.
5. For complaints about anti-Semitism see, for example, Friedrich Portheim to Franz Wickhoff, 27 January 1886, Wickhoff *Nachlaß*, Kunsthistorisches Institut der Universität Wien.
6. "Richard" to Wickhoff, 30 January 1902, Wickhoff *Nachlaß*.
7. On Wagner's plan, see Peter Haiko, "The Franz Josef-Stadtmuseum: The Attempt to Implement a Theory of Modern Architecture," in *Otto Wagner: Reflections on the Raiment of Modernity (Issues and Debates*, Vol. 3), edited by Harry Francis Mallgrave (Santa Monica: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities), pp. 53–83.
8. Margaret Olin, "Alois Riegl and the Crisis of Representation in Art Theory, 1880–1905" (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of Chicago, 1982), published in revised form as *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).
9. The practice of using later events to judge or cast an ominous shadow over earlier ones has been criticized as "foreshadowing" or "backshadowing" by Michael André Bernstein, "Foregone Conclusions: Narrating the Fate of Austro-German Jewry," *Modernism/Modernity* 1 (January 1994): 57–79.
10. Michael Shank, *Unless You Believe, You Shall Not Understand: Logic, University, and Society in Late Medieval Vienna* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 171; and communications with the author. The inscription is quoted on page 197, n. 117.
11. Politically-oriented analyses of Strzygowski's explorations can be found in Margaret Olin, "Alois Riegl: The Late Roman Empire in the Late Habsburg Empire," in *The Habsburg Legacy: National Identity in Historical Perspective*, edited by Ritchie Robertson and Edward Timms (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), pp. 107–120; and Suzanne Marchand, "The Rhetoric of Artifacts and the Decline of Classical Humanism: The Case of Josef Strzygowski," *History and Theory* 33 (1994): 106–130.
12. Strzygowski's biography, complete with its nationalist overtones, can be found in Alfred Karasek-Langer, "Josef Strzygowski: Ein Lebensbild," in *Festschrift J. Strzygowski 70 Jahre. Schaffen und Schauen*, Vol. viii, 7 (Kattowitz, 1933), pp. 36–46.
13. Josef Strzygowski, *Orient oder Rom: Beiträge zur Geschichte der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Kunst* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1901), p. 147.
14. Strzygowski, *Orient oder Rom*, pp. 37, 39.

15. Strzygowski, *Orient oder Rom*, p. 39.
16. Strzygowski, *Orient oder Rom*, p. 150.
17. "Hellas in des Orients Umarmung," *Beilage zur Münchener Allgemeinen Zeitung* 40 and 41 (1902), p. 314.
18. "Hellas in des Orients Umarmung," p. 326. To capture the tenacity of the race that created it, Strzygowski cites the phrase "der ewige Jude" ("Eternal Jew"), thus uniting Jew and "ruthless Turk" in a narrative that had little to do with either.
19. "Hellas in des Orients Umarmung," p. 315.
20. "Hellas in des Orients Umarmung," p. 326. Italy's allure threatened to turn the "powerful Germanic breed" to mannerism.
21. "Hellas in des Orients Umarmung," p. 314.
22. *Werden des Barock bei Raphael und Correggio*. (Strassburg: J. H. Ed. Heitz, 1898), p. 121. This work also (pp. 120, 125) contains allusions to the immensely popular German nationalist volume *Rembrandt als Erzieher*, by "ein Deutscher" ("a German") (Leipzig: Hirschfeld, 1890). On Langbehn, see Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1961), pp. 97–183.
23. *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart: Ein Büchlein für Jedermann* (Leipzig: Quelle und Meyer, 1907), p. 270.
24. Alois Riegl referred to Lieberman's art as a typical example of *Stimmungskunst* in "Die Stimmung als Inhalt der modernen Kunst," in *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, edited by Karl M. Swoboda (Augsburg/Vienna: Benno Filser, 1929), p. 36. He illustrated the original publication in the *Graphische Künste* 22 (1899): 47, with a drawing by Liebermann. But in a review of *Die deutsche Kunst des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts: Ihre Ziele und Thaten*, by Cornelius Gurlitt, he denied Liebermann a "Germanic" nature, writing that he "ebensogut Franzose sein könnte" ("could as well be French"). *Die Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für vervielfältigende Kunst*, supp. to *Graphischen Künsten* 23 (1900): 3.
25. The remark follows a bibliographic citation (*Denkschriften der K. Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien*, Bd. LI, p. 185). Strzygowski, *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart*, p. 270.
26. *Der bildende Kunst der Gegenwart*, p. 275.
27. Strzygowski, *Europas Machtkunst im Rahmen des Erdkreises: Eine grundlegende Auseinandersetzung über Wesen und Entwicklung des zehntausendjährigen Wahnes: Gewaltmacht von Gott's Gnaden statt völkischer Ordnung, Kirche statt Glaube, Bildung statt Begabung: vom Nordstandpunkt planmäßig in die volksdeutsche Bewegung eingestellt* [Europe's Art of Power in a Global Context: A Fundamental Analysis of the Essence and Development of the Thousand-Year Delusion: Dominion of God's Mercy Instead of National Order, Church Instead of Belief, Education Instead of Talent: From the Point of View of the North, Systematically Adjusted to the Ethnic German Movement] (Vienna: Wiener Verlagsgesellschaft, 1941), p. 749.
28. Several of these statements are quoted in Hilde Zaloscer, "Kunstgeschichte und Nationalsozialismus," in *Kontinuität und Bruch 1938–1945–1955: Beiträge zur österreichischen Kultur- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, edited by Friedrich Stadler (Vienna/Munich: Jugend und Volk, 1988), pp. 292–293. On Strzygowski's scholarship and reception, see W. Eugene Kleinbauer, "Prolegomena," in *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture: An Annotated Bibliography and Historiography* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1992), pp. lxxi–lxxxii. Citing Otto Demus as her source, Eva Frodl-Kraft expressed the opinion that Strzygowski's preoccupation with the North led to racism only after his retirement, and proffers his struggle with cancer as a contributing factor. "Eine Aporie und der Versuch ihrer Deutung: Josef Strzygowski–Julius v. Schlosser," *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 42 (1989): p. 38, n. 117.
29. Strzygowski criticized another scholar for failing to see "wie zwei Strömungen mit einander kämpfen und die eine endlich den Sieg erringt" ("how two currents fight with one another and one finally achieves victory"). Review of *Spätromische Kunstindustrie*, by Alois Riegl, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 2 (1902): 266.
30. On the role of institutions in forming "official nationalisms," see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), esp. pp. 80–103; on narratives of nationalism, see Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New

- York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 139–170. On the relation between racism and nationalism, see Etienne Balibar, “Racism and Nationalism,” in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, by Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, translated by Chris Turner (London, New York: Verso, 1991), pp. 37–67. On the historical distinction between racist and religious anti-Semitism, see Wistrich, *Anti-Semitism*, pp. 3–53.
31. Johann Gottfried Herder, “Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit” (1774), in Johann Gottfried Herder, *Schriften*, edited by Karl Otto Conrady (Munich: Rowolt, 1968), pp. 64–139; Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (1755) (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1969).
32. For relevant quotations and some analysis, see Paul Frankl, *The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretation through Eight Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 417, passim.
33. According to a lecture given in opposition to Fraktur: Report of a lecture delivered by Engelbert Mühlbacher on 25 January 1883, on “Die Entwicklung der Schrift,” *Mitteilungen des k.k. österreichischen Museums für Kunst und Industrie* 18 (April, 1883): 374–375.
34. On the polemical use of scholarship to argue for specific national or international goals, see Olin, “Alois Riegl: The Late Roman Empire in the Late Habsburg Empire.”
35. Balibar, “The Nation Form: History and Ideology,” in *Race, Nation, Class*, pp. 86–106.
36. Hubert Janitschek, *Geschichte der deutschen Malerei* (Berlin: G. Grote’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1890), p. 4.
37. Janitschek, p. 3.
38. Sophus Müller, *Nordische Altertumskunde nach Funden und Denkmälern aus Dänemark und Schleswig*, translated by Otto Luitpold Jiriczek (Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1898), 2:308.
39. Early in the century, the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure first argued that in language, meanings are created in conjunction with contrasting meanings. *Course in General Linguistics*, edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, translated by Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959).
40. The tabernacle is, however, often described, for example, by Franz Kugler, *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Ebner u. Seubert, 1842), pp. 77–78.
41. Georges Perrot and Charles Chipiez, *Histoire de l’art dans l’antiquité (Judée, Sardaigne, Syrie, Cappadoce*, Vol. 5) (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1887), p. 475.
42. Elie Faure, *History of Art: Ancient Art*, translated by Walter Pach (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1921), pp. 104–105.
43. Wilhelm Lübke, *Outlines of the History of Art*, edited by Clarence Cook (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1888), Vol. 1, p. 86. The book was first published in German in 1860. For a discussion of the ideological implications of the interpretation of Phoenicians and Jews in nineteenth-century scholarship, see Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization (The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785–1985, 1)* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), pp. 337–399.
44. Heinrich Wölfflin, “Max Liebermann” (1927), in *Kleine Schriften (1886–1933)*, edited by Joseph Gantner (Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1946), pp. 139–140. Wölfflin helped Liebermann get an honorary degree from Berlin University and was careful to recommend Jewish colleagues and students for jobs they could actually get. Joan Hart kindly communicated this information to me.
45. Alois Riegl, *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (1893), repr. ed. (Berlin: Richard Carl Schmidt, 1923), pp. 120–150, esp. p. 127, where he raises the issue of the relation between the Myceneans and the Greeks. The relationship between anti-Semitism and the conception of Greek nationality held by classicists is a major theme of Bernal, *Black Athena*, Vol. 1. A historical timelessness is often attributed to non-European “Others.” For a relevant argument see Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
46. Herbert Read explains the lack of Jewish art in this way, for example. *Art and Society* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1937), p. 99. Wistrich traces this attitude to Voltaire. *Anti-Semitism*, pp. 48–49.
47. G. W. F. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, translated by T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1948), pp. 182–205.

48. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, p. 192.

49. According to Renan, the "Semitic" race had "no mythology, no epic, no science, no philosophy, no fiction, no plastic arts, no civic life: there is no complexity, nor nuance; an exclusive sense of uniformity." Quoted in Wistrich, *Anti-Semitism*, p. 47.

50. Richard Wagner, "Das Judentum in der Musik" (1850), *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen* (Leipzig: E. W. Fritsch, 1887–88), Vol. 5, pp. 66–85.

51. Exodus (31:1) relates that God filled Bezal'el with the spirit of the Lord, as well as wisdom and understanding and skill in all manner of workmanship.

52. Richard I. Cohen, "An Introductory Essay: Viewing the Past," in *Art and Its Uses: The Visual Image and Modern Jewish Society* (*Studies in Contemporary Jewry* VI), edited by Ezra Mendelsohn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). p. 5. On Zionist debates on the role of Jewish art, see Michael Berkowitz, "Art in Zionist Popular Culture and Jewish National Self-Consciousness," in *ibid.*, pp. 9–42.

53. Martin Buber, introduction to *Juedischer Kuenstler*, edited by Martin Buber (Berlin: Juedischer Verlag, 1903), n.p.

54. Martin Buber, *Ich und Du* (Leipzig: Schocken Verlag, 1923).

55. Buber, introduction to *Juedische Kunst*.

56. Judaism has recently been interpreted so as to make it comparable to or in some cases responsible for a number of modern and contemporary intellectual currents. The most extreme such argument is Susan A. Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982). Nazi ideology, of course, also saw Jews as responsible for contemporary culture, but in a less positive light.

57. Some of these essays can be found in Harold Rosenberg, *Discovering the Present: Three Decades in Art, Culture, and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 223–287.

58. Harold Rosenberg, "Is There a Jewish Art?" (1966), in *Discovering the Present*, pp. 223–231. He begins the essay (p. 223) by citing a German art historian who divides twentieth-century painting into "a Mediterranean mode and a Northern or Germanic mode." See Margaret Olin, "C[lement] Hardesh (Greenberg) and Company: Formal Criticism and Jewish Identity," in *Too Jewish? Challenging Traditional Identities*, edited by Norman L. Kleeblatt (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

59. Kaufmann's essay, "Zur Geschichte der jüdischen Handschriften-Illustration," first appeared as the appendix to Heinrich Müller and Julius v. Schlosser, *Die Haggadah von Sarajevo* (Vienna, 1898). It was reprinted in David Kaufmann, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt a.M.: Kommissions-Verlag von J. Kauffmann, 1915), Vol. 3, pp. 173–228.

60. Julius v. Schlosser, "Die Bilderschmuck der Haggadah," in *Die Haggadah von Sarajevo*, edited by Heinrich Müller and Julius v. Schlosser (Vienna: A. Holder, 1898), pp. 211–252. His remarks include speculations about the relation between Askenazim and Sephardim, imputing to both racial mixtures with surrounding peoples (pp. 216–218), and a closing discussion of the tendency of Jews to participate in surrounding cultures, "of course in their more appreciative than freely creative way." They did, however, "distort" such styles when they brought them to the East (p. 248). On the Italian identity of Schlosser and other Austrian scholars, see Olin, "Alois Riegl: The Late Roman Empire in the Late Habsburg Empire," pp. 107–120.

61. Adolf Goldschmidt, review of *Die Haggadah von Sarajevo*, by Heinrich Müller and Julius v. Schlosser, *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* 23 (1900): 333f.

62. Jean Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, translated by George J. Becker (1948) (New York: Grove Press, 1962). See comments on Sartre in Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 11–12.

63. Such as Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman.

64. Goodenough, as described by Michael Avi-Yonah, "Goodenough's evaluation of the Dura Paintings: A Critique," in *The Dura-Europos Synagogue: A Re-evaluation, 1932–1972 (Religion and the Arts, Vol. 1)*, edited by Josef Gutmann (Missoula: American Academy of Religion, Society of Biblical Literature, 1973), p. 130.

65. Rudolf Arnheim, "The Gestalt Theory of Expression," *Psychological Review* 56 (1949): 156–171, esp. pp. 158, n.1, 169. The author of the interesting study cited by Arnheim was born in Argentina to an orthodox Yiddish-speaking family. His dissertation, under Franz Boas, was intended to refute the Nazi science of race by showing that gesture systems are environmental, not inherited. To compare the gestures with the "spirit" of the group with an eye to a physical explanation would have been hard to reconcile with this goal, although an attempt at an environmental explanation might well have been appropriate. David Efron, *Gesture and Environment* (New York: King's Crown, 1941), reprinted as *Gesture, Race and Culture (Approaches to Semiotics, Vol. 9)*, edited by Thomas A. Sebeok (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1972).

66. Bernard Berenson, *Aesthetics and History in the Visual Arts* (New York: Pantheon, 1948), p. 167. According to his preface, Berenson completed the manuscript in 1941, and the notes identify the passages cited as having been written in 1938.

67. In fact, Berenson is briefly mentioned in the major study of the phenomenon of Jewish self-hatred. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred*, pp. 318–319. See also Meyer Schapiro, "Mr. Berenson's Values," in his *Theory and Philosophy of Art: Style, Artist, and Society* (New York: George Braziller, 1994), pp. 209–226.

68. Berenson, pp. 162–163.

69. Linda Nochlin persuasively argued the lack of relation between Pissarro's Jewish identity and his work in "Degas and the Dreyfus Affair: Portrait of the Artist as an Anti-Semite," in *The Dreyfus Affair: Art, Truth and Justice*, edited by Norman L. Kleeblatt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 96–116. Further remarks on the same subject appear in Richard I. Cohen, "The Visual Dreyfus Affair: A New Text?," in *Art and Its Uses*, pp. 72–73. This position was challenged by Nicholas Mirzoeff at the symposium "Prophets and Losses: Jewish Experience and Visual Culture," Southern Methodist University, October 1995.

70. On Jewish identity see especially Clement Greenberg, "Kafka's Jewishness," in his *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 266–173; "Under Forty: A Symposium on American Literature and the Younger Generation of American Jews," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism (Perceptions and Judgments, 1939–1944, Vol. 1)*, edited by John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 176–178; and "Self-Hatred and Jewish Chauvinism: Some Reflections on 'Positive Jewishness,'" in *The Collected Essays and Criticism (Affirmations and Refusals, Vol. 3)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 45–88. For an expanded discussion of Greenberg's relation to Jewish identity, see Olin, "C[lement] Hardesh (Greenberg) and Company."

71. Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism (Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949, 2)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 216.

72. On Ardon's Jewish themes, see Michele Vishny, *Mordecai Ardon* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1973); and Ziva Amishai-Maisek, *Depiction and Interpretation: The Influence of the Holocaust on the Visual Arts* (Oxford/New York: Pergamon, 1993), p. 256.

73. Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. 1, pp. 164–5, Vol. 2, pp. 304–305. Benjamin Harshav has made a start on interpreting Chagall's art in the light of his Jewish heritage for an art historical audience in "The Role of Language in Modern Art: On Texts and Subtexts in Chagall's Paintings," *Modernism/Modernity* 1, no. 2 (1994): 51–85.

74. Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. 1, p. 178.

75. Ernst E. Herzfeld, *Archaeological History of Iran* (London: British Academy, 1935), pp. 51–2. Berenson (*Aesthetics and History*, p. 159) quotes this passage with approval. Strzygowski (*Spuren indogermanischen Glaubens in der Bildenden Kunst* [Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1936], p. 455) quotes a similar passage on p. 99 of Herzfeld's book to indicate Herzfeld's lack of understanding of art that comes from the north.

76. Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon" (1940), in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, edited by Francis Fascina (London: Harper and Row, 1985), pp. 35–46. Greenberg does historicize "purism" in prefatory and closing remarks. But he supports it nevertheless against a "confusion of the arts," p. 35.

77. Engelbert Mühlbacher, "Die Entwicklung der Schrift."

78. His answer to Strzygowski's attack on his own work, while expressing embarrassment at Strzygowski's rhetoric, argued that there was no essential difference between their assessments of the significance of the East. Alois Riegl, "Spätrömisch oder orientalisches?," *Münchener Allgemeine Zeitung*, Beilage, 23, 24 April 1902.

79. Alois Riegl, *Das holländische Gruppenporträt* (1902), edited by Karl M. Swoboda, 2 vols. (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Staatsdruckerei, 1931), pp. 212, 221.

80. Catholicism probably contributed to the pride with which they did so. Indeed, in 1938, Freud viewed the Catholic church as Austria's last bulwark against the Nazis. Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, translated by Katherine Jones (New York: Random House, 1939), pp. 67–68.

81. "Salzburgs Stellung in der Kunstgeschichte," *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, pp. 111–132.

82. The disparaging remarks on patriotism and monuments can be found in Riegl's response to Georg Dehio: "Neue Strömungen in der Denkmalpflege." *Mitteilungen der k.k. Zentralkommission für Erforschung und Erhaltung der Kunst- und historischen Denkmale*, 3rd ser. 4 (1905): 85–104. A nationalist socialist author who disapproved was Hans Gerhard Evers, "Georg Dehio und Alois Riegl im Gespräch über die Denkmalpflege," in *Tod, Macht und Raum als Bereiche der Architektur* (Munich: Neuer Filser-Verlag, 1939) pp. 283–303. A modern comparison between Dehio and Riegl on this point also seems to favor Dehio's position. Marion Wohleben, "Vorwort," in *Konservieren, nicht restaurieren. Streischriften zur Denkmalpflege um 1900*, by Georg Dehio and Alois Riegl, *Bauwelt Fundamente* 80 (Braunschweig, Wiesbaden: Friedr. Vieweg & Sohn, 1988), pp. 7–33.

83. "Nach so vielen Beweisen ursprünglicher Zusammengehörigkeit aller dieser Stil und ihrer Uebereinstimmung mit der dekorativen altchristlichen Kunst darf wohl der Wahn, es habe eine urgermanische Ornamentik gegeben, für welche am entschiedensten Sophus Müller eingetreten ist, als beseitigt betrachtet werden. Es hat ja auch ebenso wenig eine urgermanische Schrift existiert." Friedrich Portheim, *Über den dekorativen Stil in der altchristlichen Kunst* (Stuttgart: Spemann, 1886), pp. 36–7.

84. Carl Vinnen (ed.), *Ein Protest deutscher Künstler* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1911). On the protest, see Peter Paret, *The Berlin Secession: Modernism and Its Enemies in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 182–199.

85. Wilhelm Hausenstein, "Mittelstandspolitik," in *Kampf um die Kunst: Die Antwort auf den "Protest deutscher Künstler"*, edited by Alfred Walter Heymel (Munich: R. Piper, 1911), p. 108.

86. The Emperor attempted to annul Lueger's election as mayor, preventing him for two years (from 1895 to 1897) from assuming his post. Lueger remained a popular mayor and role model for Adolf Hitler. He died in 1910.

87. Carol Krinsky, *Synagogues of Europe: Architecture, History, Meaning* (New York: Architectural History Foundation; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), p. 1.

88. H. W. Janson, *History of Art*, 4th ed., rev. Anthony F. Janson (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991), pp. 252–253. Anabelle Jane Wharton, "Good and Bad Images from the Synagogue of Dura Europos: Contexts, Subtexts, Intertexts," *Art History* 17 (March 1994): 1–25.

89. Hugh Honour and John Fleming, *The Visual Arts: A History*, 3rd ed. (New York: Abrams, 1991), pp. 261–262. See also Frederick Hartt, *Art: A History of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall; New York: H. N. Abrams, 1989), p. 292.

90. The phrase "complexity and contradiction" is from Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966).

91. See, for example, Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), or *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

92. A work that has been important in my own thinking in this regard is Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, translated by Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University, 1988).

93. She recently co-edited a collection of essays concerning the construction of the Jew in the arts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Linda Nochlin and Tamar Garb, ed., *The Jew in the Text* (London, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996). See also her Forward, "The Couturier and the Jew," in *Too Jewish? Challenging Traditional Identities*, pp. xvii–xx.

Jewish Knowing: Monism and Its Ramifications

M I C H A E L L. S A T L O W

THOUGH IT MAY NO LONGER BE FASHIONABLE TO INVOKE the platonic concept of a dualistic body/soul anthropology, one of its basic assumptions—that the rational element of human beings is in some way distinct and separable from at least most of the body—is still very much with us. When we discuss the topic explicitly we now call it the “mind/body problem,” separating cognition and carnal living. Hence, even when we frequently use physiological models of thought we focus on the brain and its activity, as being distinct from, for example, the work of the large intestine. Implicitly, the assumption that “knowledge” is cognitive, that one can know something by reading about it or being otherwise informed about it, is fundamental to much of what we do. Our assumption that knowledge is acquired through thought, which is a distinct and localized phenomenon, is of course at the heart of our entire educational enterprise.¹

Now, it has been well-noted that neither the Bible nor rabbinic literature shares this dualistic conception of the body. The rabbinic literature does frequently refer to the *neshamah* (soul), but this, like the *ruach Elohim* (breath of God) appears to refer to a vivifying force rather than to that force that makes humans moral or rational agents. For the Rabbis, although the *neshamah* could separate from the body and “float in the air,” it does not think.² Both the Bible and rabbinic literature regard humans monistically. Although a person cannot live without God’s “contribution,” a living person does, thinks, and exists as a single organic entity. And while some Medieval philosophers may disagree, it seems to me that this is an assumption that has been part of most Jewish traditions up to the modern period.

This assumption only loses force with the presentation of Judaism in Western terms which was brought about by the conflict over Jewish emancipation in the last centuries. That is, although a dualistic understanding of the body has entered Judaism through the influence of Greek philosophy and the need to express Judaism in Western terms, this understanding obscures the monistic view of the self/body that is at the core of classical Judaism.

Although this simple conflict between traditional Western and Jewish thought is commonly known, its implications for modern Judaism are not fre-

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quently discussed. There are two clusters of questions to which such a conflict gives rise. First, given that most modern understandings of Judaism are grounded in Western dualistic assumptions, is it useful or desirable to jettison them in favor of “pre-modern” assumptions? Second, if we do take the monistic model seriously, what are the implications for these assumptions on how we today understand Judaism? This article is concerned with the second question: how does the explicit uncoupling of “thought” and “knowledge” from the “mind,” “brain,” or “soul”—and its concomitant assimilation into the body as whole—change the way we might understand Judaism?

Consider this essay a probe, a “what if” inquiry: *what if* we change our presuppositions and follow through with the logical consequences of such a shift? How do certain Jewish concepts that we have become accustomed to explaining with dualistic assumptions look when seen with monistic assumptions? The point of this exploration is to show that in fact a shift of presuppositions can lead to far-reaching shifts of understanding, which in turn help us to see certain traditional Jewish concepts in new ways. I am not arguing that these monistic presuppositions or their ramifications are more historically accurate (i.e., the Rabbis really thought like this) or “authentic.” Instead, I want to show how ancient presuppositions can be useful to modern understandings.

What impact does a monistic model have on the way we understand knowledge? How does the explicit uncoupling of “thought” and “knowledge” from the “mind,” “brain,” or “soul”—and its concomitant assimilation into the body as a whole—change the way we might understand certain traditional Jewish concepts? Specifically, how does this epistemological shift influence our understandings of God and of the *mitzvot*? I choose these two concepts because they represent two poles. If knowledge and being are synonymous, what does it mean to “know” God? And if *mitzvot* are performed by the body, how do they act upon “knowledge”? A monistic model, moreover, provides a powerful analytic tool for describing how *mitzvot* function on an individual and a communal basis.

2. Knowledge

The epistemological implications of divesting the “mind” or “brain” of its monopoly on thought are both clear and radical: the whole person “knows.” Knowledge is acquired not only through what one reads or memorizes, but by what one does. Just as the body then “knows” what one reads, so too does what we call the “mind” “know” what one does. A physical action then gives a person knowledge that is *qualitatively* the same as knowledge acquired in the classroom. The acquisition of knowledge becomes a bodily activity, one that involves a person’s entire being. To say that one’s “mind” knows something, or that one knows something only in a certain way (e.g., cognitively), becomes a case of *non sequitur*. While the acquisition of certain forms of information might involve one kind of “intake” or sense more than another, the transformation of that information into knowledge is diffused throughout one’s entire being.

The radical corollary to this approach is that *knowledge and being are synonymous*. If one only knows through one’s whole being, then knowledge in fact transforms being. That is, not only one’s mind feels the effect of knowledge, but in fact so does one’s entire being. To view knowledge through the prism of the

monistic body means that the truest knowledge of a thing lies in being that thing or event; short of that impossibility, one can only approach knowledge to the extent that she or he approaches being that thing or event. One is what one knows, and conversely, one can only truly know what one is.

There is nothing new or philosophically problematic in this formulation. Although existentialists such as Martin Buber to my knowledge never phrase the issue like this, it appears that they end up at the same conclusion. Buber, for example, acknowledges the possibility of knowledge-without-being, but this is the “I-It” relationship between subject and object, necessary but far inferior to the “I-Thou” relationship between two subjects.³ Many of the same objections that have been leveled at Buber are equally applicable here. Yet formulating the issue in this way allows a fresh look at some Jewish issues, including the concepts of God and the nature of idolatry and practice of the *mitzvot*.

3. God, Idolatry

Paradoxically, the Torah both acknowledges human desire to know God while noting its impossibility. One of the strongest expressions of this desire is attributed to Moses: “Now, if I have truly gained Your favor, pray let me know Your ways, that I may know You and continue in Your favor” (Exodus 33:13), to which God replies, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim before you the name Lord . . . but . . . you cannot see My face, for man may not see Me and live” (Exodus 33:19–20).⁴ “Seeing” God’s face and living in this world, a midrash emphasizes, are mutually exclusive (*Sifre Num.* 103). The impossibility of true knowledge of God is why Moses requests to know God’s ways: “One who is created does not have the ability to know the Creator, only His ways” (Ibn Ezra on Exodus 33:13).

Why can humans not know God and live? If knowledge and being are the same, then knowledge of God is equivalent to being God, the One who transcends the categories of life and death. Death occurs only on this side of the heavenly firmament: it is impossible for one who lives to know the One who does not die. The import of Exodus 33:20, then, is not “one who sees God will die,” but rather, “one who lives cannot know God.”

In this same concept we might be able to locate the problem with idolatry. Yehezkel Kaufmann has noted the biblical obsession with idolatry.⁵ Although God inveighs against idolatry numerous times in the Torah, the Torah never makes explicit exactly what the problem with idolatry is. The problem with idolatry is commonly understood as a denial of monotheism. Yet when Israel turns to idolatry, the idol is portrayed as God, not a substitute for God or an addition to the pantheon. Israel, for example, only turns to the molten calf when she loses contact with God (Exodus 32). Idolatry, that is, springs from the desire to know God. One way, then, to understand the seriousness of the problem with idolatry is that although idolatry might arise from the best of intentions, it assumes that knowledge of God is possible, which with a monistic anthropology blurs the line between human and divine. *The problem with idolatry is arrogance*, the arrogance that humans can become divine implied in human attempts to know God; the same problem found in the Tower of Babel story (Genesis 11:1–9). Although the rabbinic literature to my knowledge never explicitly formulates the issue in this manner, it

does contain numerous excoriations of those who have thought themselves divine (e.g., *Mekhilta b'shelah* 8). Making an idol, as sure as building a tower, expresses an intolerable arrogance in that we presume we can cross a line forbidden to us.

When the body/self is seen as a whole, then, this is the problem with idolatry: it is the presumption that in a certain object we now know God. It is the presumption that we *can* know God and thus cross the firmament that separates heaven from earth. Knowledge of God is thus construed as dangerous not because of its content—for no matter how much they try humans can never truly know God—but because it implies an attitude that humans can know, and thereby become, God. Idolatry reflects the same attitude, thereby denying not God's existence, but God's otherness.

4. Mitzvot

While the assumption of knowledge as being can help us to see phenomena like idolatry in a new light, its real value lies in shaping our understanding of the *mitzvot*. This value can primarily be seen in two areas. First, as has been widely noted, within all forms of Judaism revelation is never enough: revelation is always seen as leading to some kind of action for which a body is required. If Torah, defined as the continually unfolding process of revelation, can be seen on some level as the word of God, its translation, or embodiment, into the will of God occurs in the *mitzvot*. The bodily execution of *mitzvot* is crucial to the rabbinic enterprise.

The importance of a body within rabbinic Judaism can help us to understand the rabbinic insistence on the doctrine of bodily resurrection at the end of days. For the rabbis, the primary model for envisioning life in the messianic period involves the full flowering of the system circumscribed by their *mitzvot*, on both an individual and a communal level. Full adherence to the *mitzvot* of course requires a body. This idea is commonly seen in the *halakhic* insistence on bodily integrity and its strict limitations on desecrating a corpse. The Jew who denies the doctrine of bodily resurrection is one of the few Jews, according to the Mishnah, denied a share in the world to come (*Mishnah Sanhedrin* 10:1), interpreted by the Babylonian Talmud to be an example of *midah k'neged midah*, measure for measure. Denial of the doctrine of bodily resurrection thus leads to rejection of the rabbinic messianic ideal of a life completely based on *mitzvot*. This, in turn, would leave the Jew with a more universal and anti-nomian messianic ideal, which from the rabbinic viewpoint would create a serious, perhaps even dangerous, “anarchic breeze,” to use Gershom Scholem's felicitous phrase. Put crudely, whether the “End of Days” will result in the full realization of the rabbinic system or in its overthrow hinges upon the doctrine of bodily resurrection.

Realization of the rabbinic assumption that knowledge is bodily also aids our understanding of the function of *mitzvot*. The philosophies (or perhaps better, theologies) of Franz Rosenzweig and Abraham Joshua Heschel have been criticized for their insistence that the value of *mitzvot* can only be realized through their performance, and therefore cannot be philosophically critiqued.⁶ It is in this exchange that Athens and Jerusalem pass in the night. The critics of Rosenzweig and Heschel are correct that neither thinker gives to the *mitzvot*

the kind of rational explanation and justification that Western philosophy demands. Both thinkers in fact remove the *mitzvot* from the possibility of purely intellectual comprehension.

By doing so, however, both Rosenzweig and Heschel, although to my knowledge they never use precisely this language, are doing no more than denying the split between bodily and rational understanding. That is, they are reclaiming the fundamentally (but not uniquely) Jewish presupposition of bodily integrity. Using this language we might rephrase the argument thus: The performance of *mitzvot* leads to knowledge, which then effects personal transformation. By doing the *mitzvot* one gains knowledge. Because knowledge is *not* assumed to be localized in a special compartment of one's being (e.g., soul, brain), it becomes part of our being, changing who we are. This understanding of how *mitzvot* function *on* a person explains why nearly all Jewish thinkers have been stymied in trying to articulate the value of *mitzvot*: those who do what the thinker herself does (who thus are like the thinker) are convinced, while most others are not. Rosenzweig and Heschel try (consciously) to articulate what essentially cannot be articulated, and those who assume that they will be able to understand the *mitzvot* solely through reading and thinking about them will inevitably become frustrated.

To say, though, that the value of the *mitzvot* are entirely beyond purely "intellectual" comprehension would be an exaggeration. Students of rituals within different cultures and belief groups have given us some ability to describe such interaction. We can thus talk of the reinforcing relationships between Jewish ideas and rituals. We can note, for example, the many different *mitzvot* against "mixing" (e.g., *shatnez*, *kashrut*, hybridization) and relate them to the Jewish myths both of creation—God created the world and its creatures in distinct categories—and of chosenness, in which God *separates* Israel from the nations as a holy people.⁷ In this example, we can see how Jewish myths and groups of *mitzvot* mutually reinforce each other, thus strengthening the single truth of which they are manifestations. What we cannot clearly see is that "single truth," the transformation that both these ideas and these rituals effect in the individuals themselves, from the perspective of the performer of those *mitzvot*. That is, all cultures contain within them complex symbols and interactions between foundation myths and rituals. Those cultures that presuppose the supreme ability of the intellect to interpret rituals and their meanings would suppose that a participant in the system could at least in theory articulate this "single truth." But those systems, like Judaism, that ascribe to rituals the power of creating their own knowledge would deny the possibility of the performer translating that knowledge into something that could be articulated and understood by non-practitioners of that system.

Throughout this essay I have contrasted those who localize knowledge in a rational element, and those who locate knowledge throughout one's whole being. I have placed the practitioners of *mitzvot* in the latter group and have treated them as a single group. Yet this is a forced unity. While I would argue that all historical manifestations of Judaism have had some concept of *mitzvot* as actions that reflect the will of God, it is clear that different historical manifestations of Judaism have defined their *mitzvot* differently. And the logic of this essay—that from a rabbinic perspective what you do gives you a type of transformative knowledge—suggests gaps of understanding between communities that practice different *mitzvot*. A

monistic anthropology predicts, for example, that someone who strictly observes *kashrut* as part of their *mitzvot* system is likely to see the world differently from, indeed *be* someone different from, one who does not keep these rules. One whose *mitzvot* system includes wearing garb that was fashioned a century ago is unlikely to “be” like someone who wears more contemporary fashions. What are the implications of these differences?

I believe that recognition of the transformative, non-intellectual knowledge generated by *mitzvot* can serve as a useful analytic tool for describing the chasms of understanding that exist today (as they always have) between Jewish groups that accept different *mitzvot* systems. Ultimately, the question can be formulated as, What is centrally Jewish? How does a Jew, or the group to which he or she belongs, “know” that proposed changes to ritual, liturgy, etc. are “legitimate,” that is, that they are still in effect “Jewish”? As we know, Jewish groups today frequently disagree on this very question, and these disagreements are usually explained as being rooted in beliefs in different ontological statuses of revelation (e.g., the Torah is the true word of God as recorded by Moses; the Torah is the word of God written and interpreted by humans; the Torah is the work of wise human beings). I would contend that the actual roots for disagreement are far deeper.

All Jewish legal systems are predominantly “top down”: determinations of *mitzvot* are made by scholars who fight among themselves for the adherence of “catholic Israel.” (Even Reform Judaism, which is theoretically based on individual autonomy, as practiced today hardly functions in this regard differently from the other groups.) How do the rabbis themselves “know” what makes a more convincing answer to a particular *halakhic* or moral problem, and on what basis do Jewish communities make the decisions as to which answers to accept, which to reject, and which to brand as “heretical” or not-Jewish?

Despite vocal claims to the contrary, in practice, these decisions are rarely intellectually justifiable. A given community accepts those customs, rituals, *mitzvot*, that “feel” right to it, that conform to the logic of what that community knows as “Judaism.” This determination is in part governed by the hermeneutical rules of the community. Hence, for example, an Orthodox community might reject the abandonment of a particular *halakhah* based on “ethical” criteria, whereas such a move might be entirely justifiable to a Reform community. To at least as great an extent, though, such decisions are made on criteria that cannot be articulated. A cogent example of this is the burgeoning of rituals that mark female life-cycle events. Although the vast majority of such new rituals violate no *halakhic* norms, they are, in many communities, frequently branded as not “authentically” Jewish, or even as violating Jewish law. In these cases, the intellectual argument serves merely to dress the *a priori* rejection of such rituals not only by the elite, but by certain communities generally.

The *a priori* determination of a rule or practice as Jewish or not, with the concomitant inability to articulate the reason for this determination, can be easily explained using the model that I have discussed above. It is not one’s mind that knows what Judaism is, but one’s entire being. Living according to certain customs and *mitzvot* transforms the whole practitioner. Hence, what I “know” to be Judaism and what other Jews who engage in different ritual practices “know” to be Judaism will differ in a way that cannot easily, if at all, be articulated. This, perhaps, is why rabbinic rulings (*pesaq*) are accepted by

only some communities of Jews: such rulings (at their best) adhere to the logic of Judaism as defined by the thought and practice of the one who makes the ruling (*poseq*), and will be accepted only by those who understand that logic as created by their own thought and practice. The consequence of this is that by adopting a monistic approach Judaism defeats all attempts to define it. That is, Judaism makes the transmission of its knowledge—understood in the full sense as being located within one's entire being—impossible to those who do not engage in similar bodily practices. Perhaps this is one reason that the rabbis were so uninterested in speculative description and theology.

NOTES

1. I will not here deal with the vast, and vastly complex, philosophical literature on this problem. Even those philosophers who assert a materialistic position (mind and body are one) find it necessary to explain the relationship between mental and physical events and phenomena. See, for examples, J. J. C. Smart, "Materialism," *Journal of Philosophy* 60 (1963): 651–62; Richard Rorty, "Mind-Body Identity, Privacy, and Categories," *The Review of Metaphysics* 19 (1965): 24–54. For one view of how gender plays into the "mind/body problem," see Rebecca Goldstein, *The Mind-Body Problem* (New York: Random House, 1983).
2. See R. Eduard Schweizer, "Body," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), vol. 1, p. 768; Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 5.
3. Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (rpt. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970).
4. All biblical translations are drawn from *Tanakh: A New Translation of The Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985). Other translations are my own.
5. Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, translated by Moshe Greenberg (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), pp. 13–20. Kaufmann's interpretation of this obsession has been rejected. See David Sperling, "Israel's Religion in the Ancient Near East," in *Jewish Spirituality*, edited by Arthur Green (New York: Crossroad, 1986), pp. 5–31.
6. See Franz Rosenzweig, "Teaching and Law," in *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, edited by Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1961), pp. 234–42; Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1955), pp. 293–313; Eugene B. Borowitz, *Choices in Modern Jewish Thought* (New York: Behrman House, 1983), pp. 180–83.
7. The signal example of this kind of correlation between ritual and cosmology remains Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (rpt. New York: Routledge, 1988), esp. pp. 42–58.

Tzedakah and Fundraising: A Nineteenth-Century Response

DAVID ELLENSON

THE ADVENT OF THE MODERN WORLD IN WESTERN AND central Europe presented serious challenges to traditional Jewish patterns of communal structure and practice. With the rise of the modern nation-state during the nineteenth century, the traditional political parameters of the semi-autonomous medieval Jewish community collapsed. Jews became enfranchised as private citizens of their country of residence and the Jewish community itself increasingly came to be organized along the lines of a voluntaristic association. The modern community—unlike the medieval one—frequently and sometimes completely lost the right to tax its members for the support of social welfare and other needs. Nevertheless, social and other needs remained great.

Modes of fundraising for the support of charitable and civic projects had to be initiated which would take account of a modern venue in which the corporate-legal structure of the medieval Jewish world had been dismantled. At the same time, these modes had to be consistent with the ancient spirit of Jewish teachings on the subject of *tzedakah* if they were to be deemed authentically Jewish. How to raise funds effectively and efficiently for worthy communal causes in a manner consonant with Jewish tradition in the modern setting became a vexing issue that came to confront virtually every Jewish community in the western world during the 1800s. The dilemma of how to do this remains an acute one to the present day.

The responsum presented in English translation below represents the attempt made by one central European Jewish legal authority—Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer (1820-1899)—to respond to the challenges posed by this ongoing issue in Jewish religious ethics in an equitable and sensitive way. Rabbi Hildesheimer was destined in 1873 to become the founder of the Orthodox Rabbiner-Seminar in Berlin. In 1867, at the time he wrote this responsum, he lived in Eisenstadt, Hungary, where he served as head of that country's second largest yeshiva. His decision transformed earlier practice and defined habits that continue in our own time.

The individual who posed the question on this matter concerning the ethics of fundraising to Rabbi Hildesheimer was Rabbi Eleasar Ottensosser (1798-1878). In 1845, Rabbi Ottensosser had established a small school for the teaching of Talmud in Hoechburg, Bavaria. Ultimately, the Hoechburg school came to prepare its graduates for admission to the Orthodox teachers' seminary which Rabbi Seligman Baer Bamberger (1807-1878) had established in Wuerzburg in 1864.

Rabbi Ottensosser, as the responsum indicates, was greatly disturbed by the fact that the *Israelit*, a leading German-language Orthodox periodical of the 1860s in central Europe, had published the names of donors and the amounts those donors had contributed to a charitable project in the pages of the periodical. As the translation of his question reveals, he was adamantly opposed to this practice and felt it violated

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Jewish law on several scores. In adopting this stance, Rabbi Ottensosser stood on solid Jewish legal foundations. After all, as he pointed out, there existed a plethora of classical rabbinic teachings which asserted that charitable funds ought ideally to be donated anonymously. Indeed, so concerned was the Talmud with preserving the dignity of the recipient of charity that it stated that when Rabbi Yannai saw someone give alms to a poor man in public, he said, "It would have been better not to have given [to] him, rather than to have given [to] him publicly and shamed him" (Hagigah 5a). The need to preserve anonymity in the donation of charity on the part of both the donor and the recipient was further embodied in Baba Batra 9b-10a, where the rabbis asked, "What kind of charity is that which delivers a man from an unnatural death?" The response, in the words of the text, stated, "When a man gives without knowing to whom he gives, and the beggar receives without knowing from whom he receives." The ideal, as the passage goes on to say, was for the donor simply to place "his money in the charity box." In this way, both the recipient and the donor remained anonymous. Thus, as Rabbi Ottensosser indicated in his query to Rabbi Hildesheimer, it was small wonder that our Sages concluded that the secret giver of alms was greater even than Moses (Baba Batra 9b) and he cited a number of codes which he interpreted as demanding that charitable monies be donated with no public fanfare.

Rabbi Ottensosser further supported his conclusion that the practice of publicizing the names of donors and the amounts they had donated to a charity was strictly forbidden by Jewish teachings by pointing to parables and maxims within the classical tradition which he felt lent weight to his conclusion. Indeed, there are many stories contained in the Talmud which relate how the donors of charity devised ingenious methods of giving alms so as to remain anonymous (e.g., Ta'anit 21b-22a). Most importantly, this attitude found expression in the Halakhah itself. In a famous and often-quoted passage contained in the Mishneh Torah, *Mattanot Aniyim* 10: 8, Maimonides asserted that the highest degree of *zedakah*—with the exception of an act wherein the donor makes it possible for the recipient to become totally self-sufficient so that the recipient need no longer seek *zedakah*—was one wherein the donor contributes in such a way so that the donor neither knows the identity of the recipient nor does the recipient know the identity of the donor. The aim here was to aid the recipient so that there would be no display of haughtiness on the part of the donor nor loss of self-respect on the part of the recipient.

In light of all this, it is not surprising that Rabbi Ottensosser approached Rabbi Bamberger—a talmudist of world renown who served as the guide and spokesman for southern German Orthodoxy during this period—for his opinion on this matter and hoped to have Rabbi Bamberger issue a public condemnation of the practice of publicly proclaiming the names of donors to charitable projects and the amounts they had contributed. Rabbi Bamberger, as the responsum states, was apparently sympathetic to Rabbi Ottensosser's position on this issue. However, Rabbi Bamberger refused to take any public stance on this question unless Rabbi Jakob Ettlinger (1798-1871) of Altona—the teacher of both Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) and Rabbi Hildesheimer, as well as an eminent talmudist whose daughter had married Rabbi Bamberger's son—and Rabbi Hildesheimer of Eisenstadt agreed to act in concert with him. In other words, Rabbi Bamberger wanted the support of the preeminent talmudists in Germany during this era in formulating a policy position on this issue. All this—as the responsum testifies—was explained by Rabbi Ottensosser to Rabbi Hildesheimer.

Rabbi Hildesheimer, as the respondent, was forced to adjudicate among competing claims. As his responsum indicates, Rabbi Hildesheimer was most sympathetic to the rabbinic warrants Rabbi Ottensosser had marshaled to support his conclusion that the practice of publicizing the names and amounts of donors and their donations was unacceptable. On the other hand, Rabbi Hildesheimer forthrightly acknowledged that

this practice led to success in the task of fundraising for worthy causes. He admitted that charitable contributions were often forthcoming only when the sums and names of the donations and donors were prominently publicized. How to balance the seeming prohibition Jewish tradition issued forbidding this practice, against the pragmatic recognition that such a practice was unavoidable if charitable monies were to be obtained from donors in a setting where the Jewish community enjoyed the status of a voluntaristic association, was the task Rabbi Hildesheimer confronted. However, unlike Rabbi Ottensosser, Rabbi Hildesheimer felt that the sources of Jewish tradition on this matter were not as clear-cut as Rabbi Ottensosser had suggested.

As a *posek* (rabbinic decisor), Rabbi Hildesheimer felt that the legal literature of Judaism and the holdings it contained allowed for more than one course of action on this question. While Rabbi Hildesheimer did not deny that the ideal mode of charitable giving as outlined in classical rabbinic sources called upon the donor to contribute funds anonymously, he did not accept Rabbi Ottensosser's conclusion that the codes and teachings of Jewish law and literature absolutely and uniformly forbade the practice of publicizing the names of donors and the amounts of their donations. He viewed many of the maxims culled by Rabbi Ottensosser as rhetorical tropes designed to move people toward a certain type of charitable activity and involvement. He did not see them as legally-actionable commands. In addition, Rabbi Hildesheimer called upon the legal convention of accepted custom and usage to legitimate the practice of publicizing the names and amounts of donors and their contributions. After all, as Rabbi Hildesheimer observed, "our ancestors" had observed this practice in regard to purchasing honors associated with "the reading of the Torah." Most significantly, he was able to justify his permission concerning this practice by citing a traditional talmudic statement which he felt granted him the right to exercise his discretion on this matter. Drawing upon a passage in Horayot 10b, Rabbi Hildesheimer concluded that Jewish tradition could in fact countenance the publication of the names of donors and the amounts they had donated if this was in the service of a worthy cause.

The passage in Horayot 10b, which deals with the role played by context and intent as factors to be weighed in assessing the morality of a deed, can be brought to bear on this aspect of *tzedakah*. The passage reads:

Ulla said, "Tamar (Genesis 38: 13ff.) committed adultery and Zimri (Numbers 25: 6ff. and 14) also committed adultery. Tamar committed adultery and kings and prophets descended from her. Zimri committed adultery and through him many tens of thousands of Israel fell."

Tamar, it will be remembered, disguised herself as a prostitute when her right to Levirate marriage was ignored by her father-in-law Judah and had sexual intercourse with Judah in order to produce offspring. Her aim, as Ulla understood it, was not sexual gratification but the continuation of the line. Zimri, on the other hand, who engaged in intercourse with a non-Jewish woman, simply wanted sexual gratification. Unlike Tamar's, his was a case of common adultery. The conclusion to be drawn from this is articulated by Rabbi Nahman Bar Isaac. In words judged by Rabbi Hildesheimer as apposite to the case before him, Rabbi Nahman bar Isaac is quoted in Horayot 10b as follows:

A transgression with good intent is more meritorious than the performance of a commandment with no intent, for it is said, "Blessed be Yael above all women, the wife of Heber the Kenite, above women in the tent shall she be blessed." (Judges 5: 24)

Yael, like Tamar, participated in what normally would have been regarded as an act of illicit sexual intercourse. She committed adultery with Sisera, the general of the

army of Jabin, King of Canaan, who had oppressed Israel for twenty years. Then, while Sisera slept, Yael “took a tent-pin, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the pin in his temples, and it pierced through into the ground, for he was in a deep sleep, so he swooned and died” (Judges 4:21). As the rabbis of the Talmud understood it, Yael committed a sin. However, her intent in doing so was praiseworthy. For, by weakening and exhausting that wicked man through sexual intercourse, Yael was able to kill him while he slept and thus contributed to the salvation of Israel.

The general tenor of Rabbi Hildesheimer’s responsum, as well as his concluding citation of this passage, seems to indicate that he did not see the permission he granted in this case as necessarily embodying the highest elements of Jewish piety. However, in deciding among competing legitimate claims and halakhic attitudes and precedents, Rabbi Hildesheimer obviously felt that engaging in a utilitarian calculus on this issue could be justified from the perspective of Jewish law. The precedential material cited by Rabbi Ottensosser was simply not seen by Rabbi Hildesheimer as sufficiently compelling to demand that the publication of the names of charitable donors and the amounts of their contributions be prohibited. In light of the principle found in Horayot 10b, Rabbi Hildesheimer felt justified in exercising his discretionary powers as a rabbinic authority to issue a decision authorizing leniency on this matter, for through the maintenance of this practice additional funds could be raised for positive charitable purposes. Such a decision, in his view, best served the interests of the Jewish community of his day.

In offering this text to an English language audience, my aim is not simply to display the viewpoints expressed on this question by two nineteenth-century central European rabbis. Nor is it my objective to offer a definitive judgment as to what a normative Jewish ethic on this issue should be. Rather, my chief hope is that this translation will lead to an awareness of the many considerations that ought to inform Jewish discussions on these matters. In so doing, the translation may well stimulate contemporary communal discussion concerning the many ethical dimensions involved in a Jewish approach to *tzedakah* and fundraising. Rabbi Ottensosser’s query, as well as Rabbi Hildesheimer’s response, are found in *She’elot u’teshuvot Rabbi Azriel (The Responsa of Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer)*, *Yoreh De’ah* #219. Current practice throughout the Jewish world follows Rabbi Hildesheimer’s decision. Here is the text in my English translation, presented according to the traditional structure of Responsa, with the question first, followed by the response.

Question Posed by Rabbi Eleasar Ottensosser of Hoechburg to Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer of Eisenstadt in 1867

In the *Israelit*, I saw the names of donors and the exact amounts of their gifts published prominently, and I was very saddened by this. I said to myself that Jews—since the moment that Israel became “a holy nation”—had always sought to conceal their charitable gifts so that the recipient would not know who had contributed to their support. And now, in the larger world, everyone boasts and haughtily proclaims what is his and looks to see if his name and his gift are displayed to the whole world.

This is contrary to what is found in the *Beit Yosef*¹ on *Yoreh De’ah* 247,² who cites the *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol*,³ who writes, “One who donates charity is required not to boast haughtily of the charity he gives, and if he should boast, he will not only fail to receive a reward for what he has donated, but heaven

will actually punish him for it.” As it is written in Baba Batra 10b, “Rabban Gamliel answered saying, ‘Righteousness exalts a nation’ [This refers to Israel of whom it is written, ‘Who is like your people Israel, a singular nation on earth.]. ‘And the kindness of the peoples is sin’ (Proverbs 14:34). All the charity and kindness that the nations do is reckoned as sin to them, because they only do it to display haughtiness, and whoever displays haughtiness is cast into Gehinnom.” And if this is the case, whose heart would not be saddened upon seeing the corruption of so many in this way, that Israel follows the ways of the nations and publicizes its charitable gifts. And instead of our hoping to be redeemed in the near future through the merit of *tzedakah*, we grant the *sitra ahara* (the devil) an opportunity to denounce us. And thus it seems that the passage from Proverbs 21:14, “A gift in secret pacifieth anger,” teaches that if charity is given in an open manner (*ba-galui*), it will arouse wrath. This is why it is written, “It is told to you, O man, what is good [and what the Lord requires of you—to do justice, to love mercy,] and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

And there is no reason to issue a leniency (*heter*) on this matter on account of the concern that if [a permission] is not forthcoming donors will not contribute large amounts. For the amount of the contribution is not our responsibility, especially if, by issuing a leniency, we would be forced to transgress the boundaries of the positive commandment of charity which specifically necessitates that charity be given anonymously. We are obligated to perform this commandment according to the will of our Father in Heaven without any deviation, and certainly not in accord with the evil inclination of those small-minded persons [who desire such publicity]. As the Maggid to the Children of Israel,⁴ commenting upon the biblical verse, “You shall not make with Me—gods of silver, or gods of gold, you shall not make unto you” (Exodus 20:20), observed. “You shall not make with Me—gods of silver, or gods of gold, you shall not make unto you,” means that if you do something with Me, i.e., perform the commandments, you shall not derive any material benefit from their performance.

All of this I have discussed with the esteemed Rabbi Seligman Baer Bamberger of Wuerzburg, and he also said that these words are right and correct. Yet, even here, he would not take action himself, but only in concert with the opinion of the father-in-law of his daughter, the eminent Rabbi Jakob Ettlinger, and you, Your Excellency.

The Response of Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer of Eisenstadt

(1) The words of the *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol* cited by the *Beit Yosef* at the beginning of *Hilchot Tzedakah*, *Yoreh De'ah* 247, and based upon Baba Batra 10b, indicates that everyone who boasts and acts haughtily on account of the charity [he has donated] is punished as the heathen are. Even so, it is not at all necessary [to conclude] that a donor [intends] to boast and act haughtily [through the gift the donor has given]. If a man wishes to act haughtily and boast a great deal—then he is deserving of Gehinnom. A man is able to inform his friends [privately] of the charitable donation prior to sending it to the collector. In truth, one who is for God will go to God, and one who is for Azazel will go to Azazel.⁵

(2) The language of Scripture, “A gift in secret pacifieth anger,” is to be understood exclusively as meaning that if [a gift] is not given in secret, it will not pacify anger. However, from where do we know that it does not mean the opposite? The plain meaning of Scripture (see Gersonides, Ibn Ezra, and Hammei’ri) does not require us to interpret it against each of these commentators and against the homilies offered by our Sages in Sotah 5a and Baba Batra 9b.⁶ Despite this, the opposite is not implied.⁷

One who wishes to merit the blessing made explicit in Scripture is able to order that his name not be published. It is also possible to be content if the collector is able to withhold the amount donated by the contributor, for then the donor does not tell the collector to publicize [his gift]. He gives anonymously and whole-heartedly—in accord with the principle that a man cannot forbid something that is not his. Perhaps then this whole inquiry is an inquiry [about the collector’s] obeying [the command of the donor not to publicize the donor’s gift].

(3) Everything said above also applies in response to Micah 6:8, “And walk humbly with your God.” Surely, the sentiment is very good. Nevertheless, the opposite is not [necessarily] implied.⁸

(4) [I would summarize] the rhetoric [you have] advanced [against allowing this practice as follows. The initial argument held] that if the names of the donors were not published, they would not give at all. This [was not seen as providing] a sufficient justification [for permitting this practice] as the [contribution] is not our responsibility. On the contrary, charity which is not given for its own sake [can be reckoned a sin]. Finally, [it is charged that if we permit this practice we] provide the sinners (i.e., Reformers) with an opportunity to claim that just as we change the law for reasons of practical necessity, so they too are permitted to do so. This concludes your pure language.

In my humble opinion, there is a counter-argument to be made to all of these claims. We are not able to deny that through such publicity contributions, with God’s help, are increased greatly. If there is a prohibition against this, how did our ancestors act so as to pledge a fixed and explicit amount for the reading of the Torah? And what is it to me that [the claim is made] that publicity in the community or publicity in the world can only be done on the condition that such publicity occurs neither for the sake of boasting nor the display of haughtiness? And what is it to us if the sinners [i.e., Reformers] falsely accuse us? Even without this, today they say one thing, tomorrow another.

(5) The interpretation of Joseph Karo is good and ethical. However, now, after they have already acted [and published the names and true amounts] in the *Israelit*, even the Gaon of Wuerzburg, Rabbi Bamberger, [believes that it would constitute] a great danger [to reverse this practice]. For the Reformers (*Ha-mithadashim*), in their deviousness, would falsely charge—since we have not found a new law—that we are engaged in hiding our ways.

(6) From all this, it seems to me that there is no need to veer from our customary path [in publicizing the amounts donated by contributors]. For even if such publicity does constitute a small sin, great is the sin done for the sake of a commandment (Horayot 10b).⁹

NOTES

1. This is the commentary of Rabbi Joseph Karo (sixteenth century) on the *Tur*, the great medieval code of Jewish law written by Rabbi Jacob ben Asher (1270-1340) of Spain.
2. *Yoreh De'ah* is a section of the *Tur*.
3. A major source of Jewish legal rulings, *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol* was written by Rabbi Moses of Coucy in the thirteenth century.
4. This refers to the *Maggid Meisharim* of Joseph Karo. Karo's commentary on Exodus 20:20 is found in *Maggid Meisharim, Parashat Yitro*.
5. See Leviticus 16:5-10. There Azazel is literally referred to as the rock in the wilderness from which the scapegoat was hurled to its death on Yom Kippur. In later Hebrew, the term Azazel came to refer, as it does in this context, to damnation or hell.
6. In Sotah 5a, it states that Proverbs 21:14 means that the individual "practices charity in secret." Baba Batra 9b asserts, "A man who gives charity in secret is greater than Moses our Rabbi," and it employs Proverbs 21:14 as the proof-text for this claim.
7. That is to say, that a gift given publicly will arouse anger.
8. That is, that God requires that the good be done in every case only in a humble fashion.
9. The full Hebrew quotation which Hildesheimer cites here is, "*Gadol ha-oseh a-vei-rah lishmah meitzvah she-lo lishmah*." This means that it may be permissible to commit a sin for the sake of a worthy goal.

Jabotinsky and His Legacy

Lone Wolf: A Biography of Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky, 2 volumes. By SHMUEL KATZ. New York: Barricade, 1996.

Reviewed by RAFAEL MEDOFF

"Everybody is wrong, you alone are right?" This daunting question was hurled at the militant Zionist leader Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky throughout his career, by challengers who demanded that he bow to public opinion. Jabotinsky's retort was simple yet powerful: "You cannot believe in anything in the world, if you admit even once that perhaps your opponents are right, and not you. There is but one truth in the world, and it is all yours. If you are not sure of it, stay at home; but if you are sure, don't look back" (pp. 195-96). This credo, to which Jabotinsky clung passionately, may have been the secret of his success in weathering the storms of controversy that surrounded him both within the Jewish world and on the battlefield of international diplomacy. *Lone Wolf*, Shmuel Katz's comprehensive new biography of Jabotinsky, chronicles the tumultuous life of the Zionist firebrand and, through his eyes, follows the trials and tribulations of the Zionist movement during its formative decades.

For a number of years, scholarly interest in the Zionist right focused less on Jabotinsky than on his followers, most notably Menachem Begin, especially in the wake of Begin's election as prime minister of Israel in 1977. Several studies of Begin's Jewish underground army, the Irgun Zvai Leumi, have appeared, as has a growing body of memoir literature by veterans of the movement.¹ Only recently have a handful of historians—Yaakov Shavit, Lawrence Weinbaum, Chanoch Rosenblum—begun to exam-

ine the political career of Jabotinsky himself and the impact of his movement, the Revisionist Zionists.² Katz's *Lone Wolf* follows appropriately. Although himself an admirer of Jabotinsky and a Revisionist alumnus, Katz approaches his subject with scholarly detachment. Unlike Jabotinsky's only other biographer, Joseph Schechtman (his two-volume study, *Rebel and Statesman* and *Fighter and Prophet*, was published in 1961),³ Katz does not refrain as a matter of principle from acknowledging Jabotinsky's flaws or occasional miscalculations, although he does not find many of them. Also unlike Schechtman, Katz had access to a rich variety of recently-opened archival sources that shed light on Jabotinsky's actions, the era in which he moved and the individuals—friend and foe—with whom he interacted. Katz utilizes them well to provide appropriate background and context.

Jabotinsky was a rare combination of intellectual, orator, and charismatic leader. He might spend an afternoon translating Edgar Allen Poe into Hebrew, then in the evening deliver a riveting Zionist lecture that would bring an audience of thousands to their feet. When one thinks of Chaim Weizmann, the scientist and diplomat, or David Ben-Gurion, the farmer and politician, Jabotinsky's uniqueness as a Zionist leader is apparent. In common with his rivals, however, the young Jabotinsky embraced Zionism in response to the rising tide of anti-Semitism in his native Eastern Europe at the turn of the century. The Kishinev pogrom in particular did more than anything else to convert Jabotinsky from acculturated intellectual to committed Jewish nationalist. His extraordinary skills as a multilin-

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gual essayist, poet, and translator were now put to use in the service of Zionism, and it was not long before he added speechmaking and diplomacy to his arsenal.

Jabotinsky's first major success as a Zionist leader was the establishment, under British auspices, of a Jewish Legion that helped liberate Palestine from the Turks during World War I. For the first time in countless centuries, a Jewish army went forth to capture the ancient Jewish homeland. By day, they fought for the Holy Land; at night, "the officers' mess, after meals, often had the appearance of a discussion-evening of the good old days in Minsk or Kishinev. Are the Jews a nation? What is nationality? Can one be a Zionist and a British patriot at the same time?" (p. 340).

Katz's account of the lobbying efforts that brought the Legion to fruition does not paint a flattering portrait of Chaim Weizmann's role. Citing internal British government memoranda and Weizmann's own letters, Katz concludes that in some instances, Weizmann deliberately undermined the lobbying for a Jewish Legion in order to strengthen his own position in bargaining with British officials over the text of what was to become the Balfour Declaration. Katz's findings differ from those of Jehuda Reinharz, who (in his multivolume biography-in-progress, *Chaim Weizmann: The Making of a Statesman*) characterizes Weizmann as having "favored the idea of a Jewish fighting force from the very beginning" (p. 168).

The tangible value of the Jewish Legion likewise remains the subject of controversy among historians of Zionism. Walter Laqueur (*A History of Zionism*), for example, accused Jabotinsky of having "grossly exaggerated" the Legion's role; Laqueur contended that it played a "not very significant part" in the Palestine campaign (p. 341-342).

Howard Sachar (*A History of Israel from the Rise of Zionism to Our Time*), by contrast, maintained that the Legion "was distinctly more than a token or symbolic force." He believed that "its role in the conquest of Palestine eventually signified as much as the ordeal of the early Zionist pioneers, and hardly less than the Balfour Declaration itself, in reinforcing the Jews' claims to their national home" (p. 115). Katz agrees with Sachar, calling the Legion "the only practical and relevant symbol, in a warring world, for the reality of the Jewish people's striving for its country" (p. 727). In the midst of World War I, the phenomenon of a Zionist army on the battlefields of the Middle East made a profound impression upon some British cabinet ministers, helping to pave the way for the Balfour Declaration and the awarding of the Palestine Mandate to England.

Almost as soon as the era of modern Zionist development under British tutelage had been ushered in, however, Arab violence cast a dark shadow over Jewish aspirations. The unexpected eruption of Palestinian Arab mob assaults upon Jews in Jerusalem in 1920, set the Arabs, Jews, and British on a deadly collision course. Jabotinsky's hastily-assembled self-defense militia, the Haganah—consisting primarily of former Jewish Legionnaires—fought valiantly against the rioters, only to be jailed by the British for unauthorized possession of weapons. As he languished in his prison cell in Acre, Jabotinsky's fame as defender of Palestine Jewry spread throughout the Jewish world, and anger over his imprisonment triggered a veritable tidal wave of protests. Probably no other Zionist leader could have inspired the chief rabbi of Palestine, Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook, to stand before his congregation that Passover and, in violation of halakhic strictures, sign a petition demanding the

prisoners' release and order his congregants to do likewise.

What had caused the Arab violence in the first place? Here again Katz takes issue with some conventional interpretations. After thoroughly documenting the anti-Semitic sentiment that was prevalent among British administrators in Palestine during the 1920s—and chiding Jabotinsky for underestimating the pervasiveness of such bigotry (p. 466)—Katz argues that senior officers of the British military government were not merely Arab sympathizers, but actually were “the initiators” of the organized Arab opposition to Zionism (p. 417). Other recent scholarship, by contrast, has downplayed the notion of a foreign hand manipulating the Arabs, viewing Palestinian Arab violence as an authentic expression of the Arabs’ resentment of the Jewish influx into the country. Katz points out, correctly, that during the early 1900s, “very few Arabs had any sense of nationality at all; the whole area of their attachment was to their village or their town” (p. 407). But loyalty to a village need not preclude religious, cultural, or political hostility. Their lack of a specifically Palestinian identity did not diminish the Arabs’ resentment of the Jewish newcomers. Interestingly, Jabotinsky himself gave no credence to the idea that the Palestinian Arabs were being manipulated into committing violence or would give up violence if they enjoyed economic progress. Jabotinsky criticized “the naive assumption that the desire of the Palestinian Arabs to keep the country for Arabs only can ever be paralyzed by such means as subsidies, economic advantages, or bribes. . . . His instinctive patriotism is just as sure and noble as our own; it cannot be bought. . . .” (p. 847).

The imprisonment of Jabotinsky and his Haganah men for their self-defense actions during the 1920 riots was a harbinger of difficult times to come. Each

outburst of Arab violence stimulated a further British retreat from the Balfour Declaration’s pledge to facilitate the establishment of a “Jewish national home” in Palestine. Temporary restrictions were placed on Jewish immigration; the eastern two-thirds of the Mandate territory were arbitrarily severed and turned into an Arab kingdom (Transjordan); and pleas for the creation of a legal Jewish defense force were repeatedly rejected. How should the Zionist movement respond? Weizmann counseled caution, insisting that the British policy shifts were aberrations. A militant faction within the Zionist hierarchy, led by Jabotinsky, argued that only a more aggressive stance could prevent England from altogether abandoning the dream of Jewish statehood. By 1925, Jabotinsky established his own wing of the Zionist movement, the League of Zionist-Revisionists, so named because of their determination to revise the Zionist position vis-à-vis London. Katz offers an amusing description of the early days at the tiny, penniless Revisionist headquarters in Paris, where Jabotinsky, as the only one in the office who could type (and even then with just two fingers) would take dictation from underlings, letters were late being mailed because there was not always enough money to buy stamps, and “to send a telegram was a major, sometimes insoluble problem” (p. 1042). But success was not long in coming. Jabotinsky’s message of Jewish pride resonated in particular among East European audiences. In the bleak interwar atmosphere of economic crises and rising anti-Semitism, Jabotinsky offered hope.

Along with the emergence of the Revisionist party and its youth movement Betar as a significant force in the Jewish world, came the burdensome responsibility of leadership, which fell almost entirely upon Jabotinsky’s shoulders. For all the many talented and dedicated men

and women in the Revisionist hierarchy, the movement inevitably focused, as successful mass movements usually do, on one charismatic leader. He shuttled back and forth from Jerusalem (until the British barred him from returning to Palestine in 1930) to Paris to London, to press the Zionist case in the halls of international power. Then it was back to his real constituency, in Eastern Europe, with occasional forays into farther-flung corners of the Diaspora, such as South Africa and the United States. His wife and son followed along, more or less, but there were long periods of agonizing separation, as one might expect the family of an international statesman to endure. The less frequent references in the latter parts of Katz's study to Jabotinsky's personal life perhaps reflect the dwindling amount of time he had left for personal matters as the crises in Palestine and Europe multiplied during the 1930s.

A correlation between the worsening Jewish situation worldwide and the growth of the Revisionist movement is apparent. From 21 delegates to the 1925 World Zionist Congress, the Revisionists won enough votes in the 1931 elections to send a delegation of 52 (out of 254) to that year's Congress, an increase of some 150%. The Revisionist surge came on the heels of the 1929 Arab pogroms in Palestine and the 1930 report by the British government's Shaw Commission that sought to pin blame on the Jews for allegedly provoking the Arab outbursts. Arab violence, British complicity, and, in 1933, the Nazis' ascension to power in Germany seemed to confirm the Revisionist view that the Jewish people were trapped in a hostile world where survival depended upon strength and assertiveness. Katz believes that if elections to the 1933 World Zionist Congress had been held early in the year, Jabotinsky and his followers might well have garnered as much as 30% of the vote.

But fate intervened. On a June evening in 1933, Labor Zionist leader Haim Arlosoroff was assassinated, apparently by two Arab criminals, on the Tel Aviv beach front. The arrest of several young Revisionists ignited a firestorm of Labor Zionist accusations that Jabotinsky had incited the murder, although the evidence against the suspects was flimsy at best. The allegation of incitement served as a pretext for numerous incidents of physical violence against Revisionists by Labor Zionist hotheads. (Katz offers only a brief analysis of Labor Zionist attitudes toward the use of violence; a more detailed discussion may be found in Anita Shapira's *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force 1881–1948*.) Although the trial was marred by irregularities and the prosecution's case fell apart so the defendants were eventually set free, not all the damage could be easily undone. Jabotinsky's name had been severely tarred, families had been torn apart by the controversy, Revisionists had been hounded from their jobs. Relations between the Zionist left and right, already tense prior to the Arlosoroff affair, would never be the same.

Quarrels over economic issues in Palestine added another contentious dimension to the Labor-Revisionist rivalry. Labor Zionists fought for an uncompromising brand of socialism, as embodied in their domineering trade union, the Histadrut, while Jabotinsky rejected the socialists' concept of class war as a threat to Jewish national unity, insisting that labor disputes be subjected to compulsory arbitration. This was more than a literary battle; there were more than a few instances of Histadrut toughs assaulting non-union Revisionist workers. Contemporary disputes between Israel's socialists and free-market advocates cannot be said to have originated entirely in the struggles between Labor Zionists and

Revisionists in 1930s Palestine, but the echoes are apparent.

Lingering resentment against the Revisionists because of Arlosoroff and labor issues explains the decision by the Histadrut rank and file, in 1935, to vote down a peace pact secretly negotiated between Jabotinsky and his Labor Zionist counterpart, David Ben-Gurion. The voters' rejection put an end to any hope of reconciling Zionism's two major camps. That autumn, the Revisionists formally withdrew from the World Zionist Organization to establish their own movement, the New Zionist Organization.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Jabotinsky's final years was the extent to which his direst warnings were borne out by events and Revisionist positions were adopted by his rivals. During the 1920s and early 1930s, he had contended that neither economic progress nor British concessions would deter Arab violence; from 1936 through 1939, Palestine was engulfed by Arab riots and terrorist attacks. The Revisionists were the first to bring unauthorized boatloads of European refugees to Palestine in defiance of British restrictions (Jabotinsky urged the adoption of extra-legal immigration as the "Jewish national sport"); later, the Labor Zionists did likewise. Jabotinsky had implored European Jewish audiences to immigrate to Palestine, "to liquidate the Exile before it liquidates you," anticipating that they would be crushed by anti-Semitism and economic discrimination; neither he nor any other Jewish leader could imagine that his forecast would come true a thousand times over. Jabotinsky had been skeptical that Britain would fulfill its pledge to facilitate the creation of a Jewish national home, although he too would probably have been surprised had he lived to witness London's total abandonment of the Zionist enterprise.

Jabotinsky had always insisted that the declared goal of Zionism should be Jewish statehood, something other Zionist leaders refrained from advocating, either because they believed an entity with less than full sovereignty would suffice or because they considered it a tactical error to articulate such a demand. Chaim Weizmann referred to the term Jewish state as the *shem hamforash*, the traditional Hebrew phrase for the unpronounceable name of God. After the Holocaust, Jewish statehood became the rallying cry of the mainstream Zionist leadership.

The question of how to achieve statehood was yet another area in which a Revisionist position began as the minority viewpoint but was later adopted by the mainstream. When Jabotinsky's disciple Menachem Begin launched his armed revolt against the British in late 1943, the Zionist leadership was horrified. Two years later, the Labor Zionists' militia was fighting side-by-side with Begin's men as part of the United Hebrew Resistance army whose efforts helped drive the British out of Palestine. Jabotinsky died too soon to witness that extraordinary battlefield unity; he was felled by a heart attack while visiting a Betar camp in upstate New York in the summer of 1940 at the age of 59.

Surveying the Zionist scene in 1972, Walter Laqueur argued that Jabotinsky "left no clear message to be readily applied in the world of the 1970s" (p. 383). Laqueur spoke too soon. Five years later, one of Jabotinsky's most faithful students was elected prime minister of Israel. Indeed, the Likud, which continues to insist that it represents the ideology of Jabotinsky, has been in power for 16 of the past 20 years, prompting Yaakov Shavit to write, in 1996: "No Zionist leader continues to be as relevant for his followers as does Jabotinsky."⁴ Shmuel Katz's intriguing, thorough and well-writ-

ten biography confirms Shavit's point. Perhaps, then, the "lone wolf" was not so alone, after all; the continued prominence of his disciples and their progeny demonstrate the longevity of an ideology, and a movement, whose impact is still felt throughout the Jewish world.

NOTES

1. The best known studies of the Irgun in English are J. Bowyer Bell, *Terror Out of Zion: Irgun Zvai Leumi, LEHI, and the Palestine Underground, 1929-1949* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977) and Thurston Clarke's more narrow *By Blood & Fire: The Attack on the King David Hotel* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1981). A good reference volume is Eli Tavin and Yonah Alexander, eds., *Psychological Warfare and Propaganda: Irgun Documentation* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1982). Also of interest are Daniel Levine's *David Razel, The Man and The Legend: The Birth of the Irgun Zvai Leumi, A Jewish Liberation Movement* (Jerusalem: Gefen, 1991) and Gideon Cornfield, *Zion Liberated: The Life and Times of Max Seligman, Defender of Jewish Underground Fighters* (Malibu, CA: Pangloss Press, 1990). The most recent example of memoir literature

is Eliahu Lankin, *To Win the Promised Land: Story of a Freedom Fighter* (Walnut Creek, CA: Benmir Books, 1992).

2. Yaakov Shavit, *Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Movement 1925-1948* (London: Frank Cass, 1988); Laurence Weinbaum, *A Marriage of Convenience: The New Zionist Organization and the Polish Government 1936-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Chanoch Rosenblum, "The New Zionist Organization's Diplomatic Battle Against Partition, 1936-1937," *Studies in Zionism* 11 (1990): 154-181 and "The New Zionist Organization's American Campaign, 1936-1939," *Studies in Zionism* 12 (1991): 169-185.

3. Joseph B. Schechtman, *Rebel and Statesman: The Early Years* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961); and *Fighter and Prophet: The Last Years* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961). Schechtman also wrote, with Yehuda Benari, *History of the Revisionist Movement, Volume One, 1925-1930* (Tel Aviv: Hadar, 1970).

4. Shavit actually first made the point in 1981, but when the essay was reprinted in 1996, he chose not to alter it. See Yaakov Shavit, "Fire and Water: Ze'ev Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Movement," in *Essential Papers on Zionism*, edited by Jehuda Reinharz and Anita Shapira, 544-566 (New York University Press: New York, 1996), p. 564.

Matriarchal Midrash

Rachel. By SAMUEL DRESNER. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.

Reviewed by ANDREW SCHEIN

One of the difficulties of the Bible for the modern reader is the apparent androcentrism of the text. In response to this difficulty, recent studies, including Phyllis Trible's *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, have argued that androcentrism is not found in the text but is due to interpreters. Drawing on this current of thought, Samuel Dresner in his recent book *Rachel* argues that the Bible is not androcentric, but his argu-

ments rely on midrashim as opposed to a literal interpretation of the text. He examines the life of Rachel, one of the four matriarchs of the Jewish people, and argues that her influence is felt not just in the book of Genesis but extends throughout Jewish history. He highlights midrashim which are not well known to show the importance of Rachel.

Rachel, as readers of the Bible know, first appears in the Bible in Genesis 29, as a shepherdess working for her father, Laban. When bringing her sheep to the

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well, she meets Jacob and they fall in love. Jacob works for seven years to marry Rachel, but Laban fools Jacob on the wedding night, and marries him instead to Leah, Rachel's older sister. Afterwards, Rachel also married Jacob, but the marriages were marred by conflict between Rachel and Leah.

Dresner discusses the conflict between Rachel and Leah, and argues that Rachel was more "worthy" than Leah. Dresner explains that the conflict between the sisters centered on the contest between love and motherhood. He claims that Leah was never loved by Jacob, while Jacob always loved Rachel. However, Leah had many children, while initially Rachel was unable to have any. Thus, Leah had many children, and wanted Jacob's love, while Rachel had Jacob's love and desired children. Dresner argues that Rachel was victorious when she gave birth to her first son, Joseph, as Rachel attained motherhood and had Jacob's love.

This belief that Rachel and Jacob's love was permanent and constant is a popular understanding of the story, but it does not accord with a literal reading of the text. Genesis 29:31–30:24 records the birth and names of Rachel's and Leah's children. After Leah's fourth son, Judah, was born, Genesis 30:1 records that Rachel was jealous of her sister and demanded of Jacob "give me sons, or else I will die. Jacob responded harshly, "Can I take the place of God who has denied you fruit of the womb?" Dresner quotes a commentator who claimed that Jacob's response was "affectionate" (p. 56), but it is clear from Jacob's anger and Rachel's demand that they are in conflict.¹

Eventually Jacob, Rachel, and Leah left Laban and went to the land of Israel. Tragically, Rachel died at the end of this trip as she was giving birth to Benjamin. Dresner makes two interesting points

about her death. First, he proposes that Rachel died because it was a breech birth. Second, he quotes a midrash that Rachel was so happy with the birth of her second son that she would have chosen to give birth even if she knew that it would cause her death. She would thus be sacrificing her life for her child, and this would then be one of the most heroic acts in Genesis.

At this point, one might have thought that the influence of Rachel would have disappeared, but Dresner argues that her real importance developed after she died, through Joseph, Jeremiah, and her burial site. As evidence for this claim, Dresner quotes a midrash about Rachel's actions on the night when Jacob married Leah instead of Rachel. When Laban switched Leah for Rachel, the text does not record any action by Rachel. Apparently, Rachel did not act to stop the switch. Why was Rachel passive? Could she not have warned Jacob or stopped the wedding from taking place? The midrash explains that Rachel was silent because either Rachel did not want Leah to marry Jacob's brother Esau who was considered wicked, or Rachel did not want Leah to be humiliated. Dresner uses these midrashic interpretations to argue for Rachel's greatness. He extends the use of these midrashim to show the influence of Rachel on Joseph and even on the redemption of the Jewish people in Egypt. Dresner argues that Joseph was able to withstand the advances of Potiphar's wife due to the fact that "Rachel subdued her desire for Jacob in silent acquiescence rather than put her sister to shame" (p. 121). Dresner also cites another commentator who claimed that the Jewish people were delivered from Egypt "due to the merit of Rachel in relinquishing her marital rights to Leah" (p. 122). Based on this approach in the midrash, Rachel, even when she

was dead, had a huge influence on the fate of Joseph and on the Jewish people in Egypt.

The midrash, however, is only one view and does not solve the question of motivation. It is possible that Rachel was willingly quiet for the sake of her sister, but it is more likely that Laban did not leave the situation to chance. Perhaps she was physically separated from Jacob and was not even present at the wedding. The midrash teaches that people should be willing to sacrifice themselves in order not to humiliate others. Yet it remains in the realm of speculation as to why Joseph resisted the advances of Potiphar's wife. Reasoning by analogy of this kind has a poetic truth but how much can be known with certainty of the influence of Rachel on the life of Joseph in Egypt or on the eventual deliverance of the Jewish people from Egypt?

Even if Rachel's influence was absent when the Jewish people were in Egypt, her image as a special personality developed in later ages. This development began with Jeremiah 31:15,² where the prophet records, "Thus said the Lord: A cry is heard in Ramah—Wailing, bitter weeping—Rachel is weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted, for her children, who are gone." As Adin Steinsaltz notes, "Rachel's place in the natural consciousness [of the Jewish people] is not so much a function of the story of her life in Genesis, but rather of the haunting imagery of Jeremiah."³ Not only is the imagery strong, but since chapter 31 of Jeremiah is read every year in the synagogue on Rosh Hashana, this is a very well known chapter in the Bible. It is not surprising then for Dresner to quote numerous midrashim to Jeremiah 31:15.

There is one theme connected to Jeremiah 31:15 which is particularly relevant today. Jeremiah 31:16,17

records, "Thus said the Lord: Restrain your voice from weeping, your eyes from shedding tears; For there is a reward for your labor, declares the Lord: They shall return from the enemy's land. And there is hope for your future, declares the Lord: Your children shall return to their country." This conclusion has given hope throughout the generations of the diaspora for the eventual return to the land of Israel. The phrase "your children shall return to their land" is a rallying cry in the Zionist movement. It has even become customary at some yeshivah in Israel for all the students to sing Jeremiah 31:15–17 at the *seudah shelishit*, the third meal of the Sabbath.

The imagery of Rachel portrayed by Jeremiah has been further enhanced by the fact that Rachel has her own burial site distinct from the other patriarchs and matriarchs. This burial site is usually considered the third holiest site in the land of Israel after the Western Wall and the Cave of the Patriarchs, and attracts numerous visitors. With the Oslo Peace accords, it has become a contested site between Israel and the Palestinians.⁴ Rachel's tomb is considered a particularly propitious place for prayer; the midrash on Jeremiah, 31:15–17 claims that the reason there is hope for the Jewish people is because Rachel's prayers were accepted by God. The hope is that just as Rachel's prayers were answered, so too God will answer the prayers of the people who go to her tomb. Dresner quotes numerous special prayers that have been developed for this site.

Given the importance of Rachel in Jewish history and midrash, how does she compare to the other matriarchs?

Sarah the first matriarch is highly praised by the midrash,⁵ but her relationship with Hagar her maid servant is troubling.⁶ Genesis 16:7 records that

she dealt harshly with Hagar, and Genesis 21:10 records that she drove Hagar out of her house. God agreed with Sarah that Hagar should leave the house, but God stated that both Hagar and her son, Ishmael, would be taken care of, a fact that Sarah could not know.

The next matriarch was Rebekah, who has been highly praised in a recent article by Leon Kass.⁷ Kass examines the story of Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 24–28), and argues that Rebekah was the more important of the two. Rebekah was the one who realized that Jacob and not Esau was to be the one who continued the covenant with God, and she acted to ensure that Jacob received the blessings of the covenant. However, the main action for which she is praised is problematic. Rebekah convinced and equipped Jacob to deceive Isaac into giving his blessings to Jacob instead of Esau. Any defense of Rebekah and Jacob is based on the premise that it was necessary to fool Isaac to ensure that the covenant was transferred to the correct son. Is this assumption valid? Would the covenant really have been passed to Esau if he had received the blessings from Isaac? Since the plot of the narrative makes it clear that Jacob was punished for his role in the deception of his father, what makes the actions of Rebekah more honorable? Jacob was punished in two ways. As Jacob fooled Esau to receive the blessings from Isaac, so Laban fooled him, and switched Leah for Rachel. Defending the switch of Leah and Rachel, Laban explicitly referred to Jacob's deceit of his father when he stated, "It is not done in our place to give the younger before the firstborn" (Genesis 29:26). Secondly, as Jacob used clothing to fool his father, so too he was fooled by the blood on Joseph's coat into believing that Joseph was dead (Genesis 37:32–34).

If none of the matriarchs are free of faults, neither are the patriarchs. Biblical directness appears at odds with midrashic tradition. Yet it is worth noting that Tamar in Genesis 38 has all the qualities of a fully developed heroine.

In *Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible*, Norma Rosen notes that, "Traditional midrash might have helped us to trace the heroic development of a woman who began in virginal submissiveness and transformed herself into an autonomous individual, clear sighted and courageous enough to see—and act—beyond her husband's purview. Such a midrash would walk a road not found in the Bible" (p. 25). Yet, this is exactly the story of Tamar. Initially she was completely passive, but when she realized that she was being treated unjustly she acted in a brave and daring manner to rectify her unjust treatment by Judah, and Judah admitted that she was superior to him.

Following Dresner's examples and argument, it is possible to argue that the importance of Tamar grows even after her brief appearance in the text. The story of Judah and Tamar appears to interrupt the story of Joseph,⁸ but in fact it plays a crucial role in the resolution of the conflict between the brothers. One of the key developments in the story is the transformation of Judah. Initially, he proposed to sell Joseph (Genesis 37:26,27), but in the end of the story he offered to trade his life for Benjamin (Genesis 44:18–31). His actions caused Joseph to reveal himself and the brothers to be re-united. What caused this transformation of Judah? Were not the actions of Tamar catalytic in showing him that one must be willing to risk one's life to rectify injustice? Initially, when Joseph was unjustly thrown in the pit by his brothers, Judah urged that Joseph be sold to the Midianites to save Joseph from death,

and while this saved his life it did not rectify the brothers' unjust act. However, at the end of the story, when Benjamin was unjustly accused by Joseph of stealing, Judah risked his life to save Benjamin. Even beyond Genesis, Tamar's importance grows. David and Solomon and all the kings of Judah were descendants of Perez, her son.

To return to the difficult question of androcentrism is to acknowledge that to a large extent it is due to readings of the Bible by interpreters with limited world-views rather than a bias of the text. Thus, in a literal reading, Tamar is a hero of Genesis. Furthermore, not all the interpreters of the Bible were androcentric, for as Samuel Dresner shows, there are many midrashim which stress the importance of women, especially Rachel. In Tamar, Rebekah, and Rachel the initiatives taken by women are fateful for the Jewish people—a fact highlighted, as Dresner makes clear in his fine book, by the midrashic tradition.

NOTES

1. See Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Bereshit*, 3rd ed. (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1976), pp. 331–338.
2. This is one of the two references to Rachel in the Bible outside of Genesis. The other reference is Ruth 4:11, where her name appears with Leah as part of a blessing to Ruth.
3. Adin Steinsaltz, *Biblical Images: Men and Women of the Book* (New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1994), p. 53.
4. See Yossi Klein Levi, "Defending Mother Rachel," *The Jerusalem Report* (August 24, 1995): 18–20, and Peter Hirschberg, "An Unholy Mess," *The Jerusalem Report* (January 25, 1996): 10–11.
5. Dresner quotes several on page 7.
6. See Nachmanides on Gn 16:7, and the notes of Charles Chavel (New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1974) on Nachmanides' comments.
7. Leon Kass, "A Woman for All Seasons," *Commentary* (September 1991): 30–35.
8. For a more detailed discussion of this chapter and its relationship to the story of Joseph, see

Umberto Cassuto, *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, Volume One (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973), and Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

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Family Histories & “The Origins of Modern Jewish Studies”

TO THE EDITOR OF JUDAISM:

... I read the series of articles “The Origins of Modern Jewish Studies and the Founding of the Hebrew University” (Spring 1996) with a great deal of interest.

Judah Magnes was one of my father’s best friends; the two of them were roommates and classmates in Cincinnati while attending the University of Cincinnati and the Hebrew Union College. My father, Rabbi Elias Margolis of Mount Vernon, New York, kept in touch with Magnes throughout the years. I just came across several postcards sent by Beatrice and Judah to my father from Palestine in 1923.

The picture on page 202 of Judah and his wife, Beatrice, indicates that Beatrice’s maiden name was Lowenstein. Was she a sister or other relative of Solomon Lowenstein, later Executive Director of the Jewish Federation in New York City? Sol was another classmate of my father’s and a very dear friend and, if my memory serves me right, they all lived in a boarding house run by the Lowenstein family. If Mrs. Magnes was related, it is interesting to note that the Lowenstein family, all three generations, came to our house in Mount Vernon year after year for Seder on Pesach and, when the Magnes’ son, Benedict, came to New York to study at Juilliard, he also was a guest for Seder. However, I don’t remember anybody mentioning that he was Sol’s nephew.

In the picture of Magnes, together with a group surrounding Solomon Schechter, taken in 1907 in Tannersville, New York, on page 200, I recognize Alexander Marx standing behind Schechter. What isn’t indicated is that all (or most) were professors at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York and were probably staying at a hotel a short distance from the photographer’s studio, the Fairmont Hotel, owned by my maternal grandfather, Simon Jacobson, who officiated as Chazan at the Seminary

Shabbat and Holyday services. Alexander Marx and his family were guests at the hotel for many years. My father met my mother several years after that while attending a Zionist Convention at the Hotel. Among those officiating at their wedding were Solomon Schechter, Judah Magnes, and my grandfather.

I was very interested in the discussion of the relationship between Chaim Weizmann and Magnes for several reasons. My uncle, Max Margolis, was the first professor at the Institute of Jewish Studies in 1924 (see note 12, page 181); my father saw him in Jerusalem that summer, so I knew about it at the time. However, I didn’t know about the philosophical differences between Weizmann and Magnes regarding the place of humanistic studies in the University’s future until I read the article. I spent six weeks in the summer of 1935 with a research group in the Department of Physical and Inorganic Chemistry at the Hebrew University and I still don’t know if only research was performed in that building, as Weizmann and Einstein desired, or if by that time they also had normal students and classes during the school year.

I still have a vivid recollection of having lunch one day after work in the laboratory with Dr. and Mrs. Magnes at their home below Mount Scopus, but I didn’t know that just about that time Weizmann had arranged to have Magnes kicked upstairs to be President of the University instead of Chancellor.

I was well aware that Weizmann traveled across this country in 1921 raising funds for the Zionist cause, but I was unaware that he also raised funds for the future University. You see, my father-in-law-to-be, Bernard Stone, was Weizmann’s Executive Secretary at the Zionist headquarters in London and accompanied him on that trip. As a result, Weizmann asked my father-in-law to emigrate to this country to work in the Zionist movement,

which he did in 1922. My wife, Vera (named after Vera Weizmann) and I are forever grateful to Chaim for the results of that trip in 1921.

I thought that this strange series of connections, joining together Judah and Beatrice Magnes, Elias Margolis, Max Margolis, Solomon Lowenstein, Benedict Magnes, Chaim Weizmann, Bernard Stone, and Asher and Vera Margolis might be of interest.

ASHER J. MARGOLIS
Chicago, Illinois



TO THE EDITOR OF JUDAISM:

... The Spring 1996 issue of JUDAISM is of personal interest to me. The article about the Institute in Palestine ("The Beginnings of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem," by Menahem Milson, in "The Origins of Modern Jewish Studies and the Founding of the Hebrew University") involves my late Uncle Max Margolis who taught there from 1924–1925; it also involves my father's roommate and lifelong friend, Judah Magnes, his wife, Beatrice Lowenstein Magnes who had to be related to Dad's other roommate at HUC, Solomon Lowenstein, also a dear friend. And what's more, there's a photo of Schechter, Magnes, Benderly, and others taken in Tannersville, New York. The year was 1907; the occasion must have been a Zionist convention held at the Fairmont Hotel in Tannersville. The hotel just happened to be where my Dad, Rabbi Elias Margolis, attended said convocation along with the others, met the proprietor's

beautiful daughter, and fell in love with her pronto. In 1910 they were married, and one of the seven (!) officiating rabbis was Solomon Schechter. Another, of course, was Judah Magnes and, I think, Sol Lowenstein as well. My grandfather just happened to be a cantor and teacher of Hazzanut at the old JTS. I have an oil painting of him executed by my mother in the chapel of the old Seminary. Mom was a very gifted artist who was trained at Cooper Union and the National Academy of Design. . . . By the way, Grandpa was Simon Jacobson. And my Dad who had left the Reform rabbinate (1901 in Stockton, CA and 1903 in Pueblo, CO) came under the influence of Schechter et al. and became a Conservative rabbi, ultimately elected to be President of the Rabbinical Assembly and the Synagogue Council. He also served as Treasurer for many years and was Chairman of the Placement Committee, matching rabbis and congregations.

I have yet to read all the articles on the origins of modern Jewish Studies and the founding of the Hebrew University and hope that they will fill in some blanks. For example, we always knew there was some discord between Chaim Weizmann and Judah Magnes, and this will in all probability clarify the disagreement. I thought that Uncle Max only stayed part of the project for about a year because one of his twin sons contracted a fatal illness and died in Palestine where he was buried.

There just might be more information in my Dad's papers and letters from Palestine in 1924, which I gave to the Magnes Museum in the Western Jewish History archival section a few years ago.

RUTH M. KAUFMANN
Mt. Vernon, New York

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AMICHAÏ

from *Tourists*
Once I was sitting on the
steps near the gate at
David's Citadel and I put
down my two heavy baskets
beside me. A group of
tourists stood there around
their guide, and I became
their point of reference.
"You see that man over
there with the baskets? A
little to the right of his head
there's an arch from the
Roman period. A little to
the right of his head." "But
he's moving, he's moving!"

I said to myself: Redemp-
tion will come only when
they are told, "Do you see
that arch over there from
the Roman period? It
doesn't matter, but near it, a
little to the left and then
down a bit, there's a man
who has just bought fruit
and vegetables for his
family."

*Written in Pencil in the
Sealed Railway-Car*

here in this carload
i am eve
with abel my son
if you see my other son
cain son of man
tell him that i

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of laughter resonating, as if having
surpassed the moment and its
trial, having presented suffering
yet having set distance from it
through the medium of his art.
Though Dan Pagis has died too
soon, may we learn from him to
live." —David Ignatow

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JUDAISM

Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car

*here in this carload
i am eve
with abel my son
if you see my other son
cain son of man
tell him that i*

*Dan Pagis, translated by Stephen Mitchell,
The Selected Poetry of Dan Pagis, University of California Press 1996*

כְּתוּב בְּעֵפְרוֹן בְּקֶרֶן הַחַתּוּמִּים

כָּאֵן בְּמִשְׁלוֹחַ הַזֶּה
אֲנִי חוּהַ
עִם הָבֵל בְּנִי
אִם תִּרְאוּ אֶת בְּנֵי הַגְּדוֹל
קִיזוּ בֶן אָדָם
תִּגִּידוּ לוֹ שְׁאֲנִי

FALL 1996